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THE DESPERADO BLACKLEGS, CONFRONTED BY THE MAN WELL NAMED DICK DOOM,
WERE WHITE WITH TERROR AND ANGER.

OR, The RIVER BLACKLEGS' TERROR.

A Romance of the Realities of the
Secret Service.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.
THE PLANTER'S HEIRS.

NOT many miles above the city of New Orleans there stands a beautiful home, which, though built many a century ago, was one of the grandest mansions in that part of the country.

It was known as "The Ferns," and was the largest estate on the coast, the late owner, Colonel Richard Grayhurst, being a very wealthy planter.

The mansion was large, rambling, with wide halls, wings and piazzas, and the grounds about it were picturesque and beautiful.

In the very prime of life Colonel Grayhurst had died, having been thrown from his horse and killed.

He had left two heirs, Gordon, a youth verging on manhood, a dashing, whole-souled fellow, a worthy descendant of a proud race, and Marion, a fair maiden not very long in her teens, a little fairy in face and form, yet a child-woman who appeared older than she was.

The two, Gordon and Marion, were returning from a horseback ride one afternoon, when the young girl drew rein where the road ran through a clump of woodland, with a thicket growing upon the levee not far away.

The grand Mississippi rolled by a hundred yards distant, upon their right, while spreading fields of sugar-cane stretched inland for miles away.

In the distance was seen the mansion of The Ferns, and up and down the river were here and there visible other plantation homes.

"Brother Gordon, do you know I never pass this spot without a shudder, and a regret," said Marion, and her eyes fell upon two grass-grown graves just off of the highway.

"I do not wonder, sister mine, when here father so nearly lost his life, and you just escaped being kidnapped."

"Yes, and but for that brave boy, Dixie Gray, both would have happened—a boy tramp he called himself, who had camped for the night over in that thicket.

"There was his little tent, his dog and all, and right there in those bushes the two men who lie in those graves, lay in ambush.

"Father and I little dreamed of danger, and poor Tom had no thought of death as he sat on the carriage-box, driving us rapidly homeward.

"It was late in the afternoon, and a storm was threatening, so Tom drove rapidly until he reacted this break in the road.

"I recall it all as though it were but yesterday. A shot rang out and one of the horses fell; a second followed, and Tom was killed; a third shot and father was wounded and the two highwaymen had us at their mercy, when another shot came and one of the assassins fell dead; a loud yelp, and a fierce dog had crushed the throat of the other in his sharp teeth.

"Then a mere boy appeared at the door of the carriage and coolly told us that there was no danger, that he had seen the two men land from a canoe, had watched them go into ambush, and came to the rescue."

Marion had told the story impressively, as though her brother had not heard it a score of times before; but he had listened with deepest interest and replied:

"Yes, brave Dixie Gray—a boy, yet a man. I was so glad that father took him home with him, made him his secretary for a few months and then sent him off to school."

"It was the cause of our having to-day our inheritance, Gordon, for Lawyer Thurston had taken the old will, which made him executor and gave him so much of the property, which father owed him for gambling debts.

"Oh, brother! I hope you will never gamble."

The face of the young man crimsoned, and as though to change the subject, he said:

"Yes, Marion, poor Dixie, after getting Lawyer Thurston's unkind letter, saying that he was not remembered in the will, went his way, and then suddenly turns up here, and finding how we had been defrauded, told us, and showed us that there was a later will, found it and the witnesses, and sent Thurston flying from the country in disgrace."

"And will not accept even the legacy in the will for him."

"No; he refuses it; but he certainly has money, and in confidence, Marion, I will tell you that I believe he is a detective in New Orleans, though he has not admitted it."

"It must be so, brother, for see how he unearthed the villainies of that man Dandridge, who, a gentleman in society, was the leader of a band of outlaws."

"Yes, that must be how Dixie gets his money."

"But, he does not go under the name of Dixie Gray."

"No, but I happened to catch sight of a letter one day, which he received, and opened, and it was addressed to Dick Doom."

"Dick Doom? What a strange name."

"Yes, and it can hardly be his real one."

"You do not believe Dixie Gray is his real name then?"

"I do not."

"He is such a mystery, for we really know nothing of his early life, well as we have known him."

"Nothing, yet he is a boy with a history, I am sure. He is true as steel, brave as a lion, and a noble fellow through and through."

"If there is aught bad, or wrong in Dixie Gray, he certainly keeps it well hidden."

"But, come, this spot has caused us to go far back into the past. We will ride on home."

They went on at a gallop, both riding with the grace and ease natural to the people of the far South. As they neared their house they saw some one upon the piazza.

"It is Dixie!" cried Marion, and the visitor received a warm greeting from both.

He was a youth of eighteen, with a face almost womanly in its beauty, a form at once slender, graceful, yet firmly knit, and muscular.

"I have been away for some time, Gordon, so came up to see if you got your affairs all straightened out, after Thurston's handling of them?"

"Yes, indeed, thanks to you, Dixie. We got all back, and lost nothing. We have your legacy, too, at your call, my dear fellow, and call for it you must."

"Thanks, I do not need it; but I have come to tell you, in confidence, that I have fully decided upon my future career."

"And what will it be?"

"I feel that I am a detective by destiny, so shall follow my fate. But, remember: this is a secret."

CHAPTER II.

DICK DOOM'S DESTINY.

THE chief of police of New Orleans sat in his private office conning over his morning reports, when suddenly there entered unannounced the youth whom the reader saw the day before at The Ferns Plantation, and whose mysterious career had been talked over by Gordon Grayburst and his sister.

The chief was a stern-faced, firm-looking man, one who had been a gallant soldier in his early life and who was naturally fitted for the arduous duties devolving upon him as a master ferrer.

He sprung from his seat at sight of the youth, and grasping his hand said warmly:

"My dear Dick, how glad I am to see you.

"So you decided to come back again after all, to the field where you rendered such good service as an Unknown Detective?"

"Yes, chief, I decided to come back, after an absence of six months, in which I have been following a trail of my own."

"I recall that when we first met you told me you had certain Secret Service work to accomplish upon your own hook."

"Yes, chief, but what it is I cannot tell even you."

"I consider that I, with others, were grossly wronged, and I cut loose from my home, kindred and all, to track a mystery to the end."

"So far I have been unsuccessful, but I have been enabled, while on my own still hunt, to do much service for others."

"You have indeed, Dick."

"Nearly four years ago, I was, as a tramp, on my way to this city, following my determination to be my own detective. Then, fortunately, I was enabled to serve Colonel Grayhurst, and his daughter, and through his kindness I was greatly aided in my education, and so the better prepared for my chosen vocation.

"When I would receive bounty no longer, after the colonel's death, I again started on foot for this city, and by a mere accident, while bidding in a lone cabin on the river, I learned of the secret band of villains known as the Loyal League of the Golden Gallows."

"Yes, and I got the credit for all your splendid work in bringing them to justice, simply because you insisted upon remaining unknown."

"And I still so insist."

"I have not forgotten that you captured a dozen criminals, murderers, pickpockets, burglars and counterfeiters; that you, dressed as a girl, took a position as clerk in the Santa Cruz Cafe, and brought that whole outfit to justice; that you ran to earth the chief of the League of the Golden Gallows; sent a dishonest lawyer a fugitive from the country; sent two men to the gallows, and eight others and three women to prison for long terms for counterfeiting and other crimes, while the handsome rewards for their capture you generously divided with my detectives and police officers."

"Now, I recall these things, as also the fact that Master Dixie Gray did not care to be known as Dick Doom, and Dick Doom did not let it be known who or what he was."

The chief spoke earnestly and Dick Doom made no reply.

Then the chief resumed:

"I have not forgotten that I was not assassinated, and when I, being forewarned, sought alone to capture my assassin, I found two instead of one, and had you not been biding there I surely would have been killed at the door of my own home."

"Detective Royal also owes you his life, for, a prisoner to those counterfeiters of the Santa Cruz Cafe, they were killing him by inches when you rescued him."

"Now, you still say you wish me not to tell who has done all this remarkable good."

"I demand it, chief, for by remaining unknown I can do the most work and accomplish the most good. Just now I am again in the harness."

"Ah! you will again be a detective?"

"There is no need of my trying to escape my destiny, chief, so I have come back to go to work."

"Good! and when?"

"I shall this time extend my field to the steam-boats on the Mississippi River, chief."

"Of all places the one for you, Dick Doom, for the Mississippi River has mysteries untold for you to solve; yes, the Detective of the Mississippi is just the thing for you," said the chief of police with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER III.

OVERHEARD.

A YOUTH, with every appearance of being a hayseed, one whose look stamped him as being what city folk call a greenhorn, was sleeping peacefully in a chair upon the forward deck of a steamer boating down the Mississippi River.

Two gentlemen were walking up and down near him, admiring the scenery and talking together.

Both were young men, and as they halted in their walk, one glanced over to the deck below and said:

"See here, Parsons; do you see that man standing there by the gangplank talking to the mate?"

"Yes."

"Well, I never forget a face, or, at least, I pride myself upon not doing so, and if I am not very much mistaken, I met that man under very peculiar circumstances just a year ago."

"Do you mind telling me what they were, Hilgartner?"

"No, as we are both followers of Æsculapius, and therefore there is a bond of affinity between us, I do not mind, for I betray no secret to outsiders, that is, to men out of the profession of surgery and medicine," and Doctor Parsons glanced at the serenely sleeping hayseed youth.

"Oh, he's asleep; and besides, he's from wayback, so would understand nothing if he heard it," said Doctor Hilgartner, for they were both young physicians who had met by accident upon the steamer some days before, and were going South to find a place where they could practice their profession."

"You note the man I mean?"

"Oh, yes."

"A man of striking appearance, as you see, with a somewhat fast look, well-dressed and courtly in his manners."

"Yes, he is all that you say."

"It was in the last year of my course in college, when that man, if I am not mistaken, came to my rooms and asked to see me."

"I had as a chum a fellow-student, so we asked him up to our room and he made known his business."

"It was in effect that he was a young physician, and from his conversation there seemed no doubt of that, who was practicing in a country town in Kentucky."

"He had been called in to attend a wealthy old gentleman, a planter, who was dying of some strange disease."

"The planter died, and the family would allow no post-mortem examination, and he dared not dig him up and investigate for himself."

"So he came to tell us that we could get the body in a certain way, he paying all expenses, so that we diagnosed the case thoroughly in a post mortem, and kept the results for him when he should call for them."

"His plan was to have us, with what other students we wished to ask to help us, go up the river to a certain point."

"Then we could make our way by night to the little family burying-ground, dig up the body and carry it to the river, where a boat would be in waiting."

"They could row to the city in this boat in a

day, and the next night could carry the body to the college, leaving no trace of their going or coming.

"We agreed to the plan, anxious to get a good subject, and we met the man who had visited us at our rooms, and were guided to the little burying-ground.

"We dug up the body, carried it to the river and then started down-stream.

"We camped a dozen miles away, until the next afternoon, letting it be thought, as he suggested, that we were upon a gunning and fishing trip.

"Well, we got the body, undiscovered, into the dissecting-room.

"It was that of a fine-looking old gentleman of sixty, and in a fine state of preservation.

"In examining the body we in vain searched for the cause of death.

"He seemed to have been in perfect health, until at length I took the contents of the stomach for analysis, and then I discovered poison."

"Poison?"

"Yes, he had either taken poison to end his life, or been poisoned for some reason known only to those interested."

"What did you do?"

"What could I do?"

"I was, with my companions, in a trap, for we would be sent to prison for robbing the grave of the body.

"But I eased my conscience by finding out who the old man was, and also writing to his son my idea that he had been poisoned, though I wrote under a fictitious name."

"I saw afterward that a large reward was offered by his son for the discovery of the robbers of his father's grave and return of the body, and there the matter ended and old Planter Gibson was dressed into a skeleton, which I have now in my trunk, intending it for my office, for it is a splendid specimen."

"And the young physician who came to you about him?"

"I never heard of, or saw him again."

"Did he not give any name?"

"Yes, he introduced himself as Doctor Valentine."

"Strange that you never saw him again."

"Oh, I guess he was frightened off by the reward offered by the son, and let the matter drop."

"And you think that is the man?"

"I am almost certain of it."

"Why do you not speak to him?"

"I will."

"Wait, he is coming up from the lower deck; I will head him off."

Doctor Parsons hastily left his friend, and went below to the cabin-deck.

But in five minutes he returned and said:

"He said that I was mistaken, that he was not a physician, and never saw me before; but all the same I believe he is the man."

And the two physicians walked away while young Hayseed awoke, descended to his stateroom, took a book from his trunk and wrote down all that he had heard, names and all.

He was not such a hayseed as he looked.

CHAPTER IV.

A MAN OF MYSTERY.

THE fashionable society of New Orleans had had a set back, in the unmasking by Dick Doom, of one of its favorites, who had been shown to be the secret leader of a robber band, and for awhile people were shocked into seclusion by the discovery of a wolf in the fold.

But the lesson was soon forgotten, and when one day a handsome schooner-yacht ran up the river, saluted the town with a gun and the dipping of her flag, and her owner sought elegant quarters in the St. Charles Hotel, there were many ready to take him by the hand, rush him to the clubs and entertainments and lionize him, especially as he was said to be very wealthy.

He held no title, was plain Mister Valentine Gibson, and all he had to say about himself was to the effect that he had been born in the Southwest, was left a handsome fortune at the death of his parents, had been educated abroad and living in Paris, Rome, Berlin and London so long, he spoke with an accent.

He had come back to America to enjoy his fortune in his native land in a way that suited him best.

Handsome, elegant, and brilliant in conversation, he was a favorite with all, yet held aloof from society in spite of the urgent invitation to accept the devoirs of that class of people who always can be found in all good society to toady to money and good looks.

Mr. Gibson knew good liquor from bad, was a connoisseur of wines, an art critic, a fair sailor,

could shoot, ride, fence and box, and played a very superior game of poker, and, because he did not need money, it was said luck always went his way.

Mr. Gibson soon rented a pleasant little unostentatious home in a secluded part of the city near the river, and had two servants to look after his comfort, with several blooded horses in his stable.

He would go for sails upon the lake, where he kept his yacht at anchor with a crew of three men; would drive on the shell road, or ride bareback in the outskirts of the city, with an occasional look in at the clubs and a game of chance now and then in a fashionable gaming-house.

Such was the way he passed his time.

He had no intimates, talked upon all subjects save himself, spent his money freely, won heavily without a smile of satisfaction, and lost even more heavily at times without the shadow of regret upon his face, whatever he might inwardly feel.

Now and then he would give a dinner at his home, which was a gem in its way.

Again he would take a party for a sail on the lake in his yacht, which bore the strange title of The Agnostic, and which some thought fitted its master just as well.

That there was something back of the man, some history, all felt certain.

Was it a love affair, or was it some sorrow upon his youth?

This no one knew, and no one had the temerity to ask him.

Not a soul tried to penetrate the barrier of his reserve.

Often, as a means of pleasure, Mr. Gibson was wont to engage a state-room upon one of the fine steamboats running from the port of New Orleans to the river countries.

He always paid for the best and got it.

One time it was a run to the plantation country about New Orleans.

Again up the Red River, another time up the Yazoo and then up the Mississippi as far as Memphis.

But he never went further up the river, for he felt that the enjoyment of steamboat travel was to be found in the far southern country.

Upon such occasions he was wont to enjoy the scenery and a cigar by day, either pacing the deck, or seated in the pilot house, where he was always a welcome visitor.

He would at night either read in the cabin, listen to the music in the ladies' cabin, or watch a game of cards in Social Hall.

Once in a while he would join in a game, when asked, but never did he seek to do so unless invited.

Of course gambling on the Mississippi at that time was indulged in by various classes of people.

A man who was traveling as a passenger in a steamboat was considered to be a gentleman.

But there were known to be men who made the lottery of life a profession.

Some of these were gentlemen, courteous, refined, elegant, and fine specimens of manhood.

Others were just the reverse, bluff, uncongenial and men who played to win and stood no nonsense.

Again there were those known as Blacklegs, and they had to be watched closely by the steamboat officers as well as the passengers.

They were men who were very light-fingered in the use of cards, who played to win, and playing cheated, whenever they could do so with profit to themselves and no danger.

And yet there was one of this class, who, though never known to cheat, was always under suspicion, while his many winnings had a look about them which really appeared like a certainty rather than chance.

This man had several close followers, and they were known as the "Five of Diamonds," their leader bearing the very appropriate name, for a gambler, of Jack Dimond, which was reversed by many to "Diamond Jack" as he fairly sparkled with those precious gems.

That "Jack Dimond" was an alias all felt certain, though no one had the hardibood to tell him so.

CHAPTER V.

DIAMOND JACK THE SPORT.

JACK DIMOND was a man as courtly as a Chesterfield.

He played only with gentlemen, never would take the winnings of a poor man, always asked if the one he played against was able to stand his losses.

He dressed exquisitely, and in perfect taste,

his only indication of the professional sport being his diamonds.

He wore a superb stone in his scarf, a pair to match it in his cuff-buttons, and another upon his left little finger.

He had a watch-chain of gold mesh, in which were loose in each link a diamond, and his "charm" was a cluster star of diamonds.

Then upon his watch was a diamond hand holding four aces made of rubies and black pearls.

It was said that his suspender buckles were of solid gold set with diamonds, and his vest buttons were of the same precious metal set with a precious gem.

"That man carries fifty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds upon his person as ornaments," said a dealer in gems, who had had a good look at the stones worn by Diamond Jack.

Of the Gambler King, as he was also called, little was known other than that he had rooms in New Orleans, but spent much of his time upon the river, first upon one steamer than another.

He always traveled with a negro valet who was known as "Black Diamond," for he too was liberally supplied with rare gems.

He was six feet four in height, a giant in strength, strangely reserved and a man of education.

He was always near his master, and there was more existing between them than the friendly regard of master and man.

What the connection of Jack Dimond was with the worse element of his profession, Blackleg Bill and the others of the "Five of Diamonds," those who knew the courtly gambler well were never able to understand, for he seemed not to have a thought in common with them.

Now and then they met upon the same steamer, but upon such occasions Diamond Jack was never known to play in a game where the others were engaged.

His ways seemed not to be their ways, and though they certainly owed him some allegiance, yet what it was no one knew, or could discover.

One afternoon the swift and palatial steamer Eclipse pulled out of New Orleans, and headed up the river, with a large number of passengers on board.

Grouped upon the deck, watching with deep interest the run close along to the levee, causing the shipping to roll and toss upon the waves of the steamer as she went flying by, were the passengers, and among them could be picked out some well-known faces.

Standing near the bell, forward, a cigar between his lips, and alone, was Diamond Jack, evidently enjoying the splendid panorama passing before him, and keeping an eye upon the dozen steamers ahead, all of which had started from an hour to fifteen minutes before the Eclipse.

Not far from him were Blackleg Bill and two of his confederates.

Blackleg Bill was a man with a face to shun, and the countenances of his two confederates were far from prepossessing.

They were "loud" in their dress, talked in tones above the ordinary pitch of conversation, were loaded with jewelry, wore flashy neckties, and had an all-important air.

Seated in front of the Texan was the mysterious young gentleman who is known to the reader as Valentine Gibson, a man about town.

He was neatly dressed, seemed to avoid rather than seek attention, and was apparently enjoying the scene.

Not far from him was a young man whose appearance indicated that he had been to the city on his first visit, and was glad to get away alive.

That he came from away back in the hills, went without saying, for he seemed to have taken the pictures of Uncle Sam as a copy for his own get-up.

His pants were striped, and the stripes were very noticeable.

Then they were a trifle short, and were held down by straps running under boots that were large enough for a man twice his size.

He wore a pair of green goggles with gold rims, and his sandy hair hung down in straight locks on either side of his face.

His coat was of gray homespun, cut after a model perhaps the style back in the hills, and his vest was red plush, and covered by a flaming watch-chain.

He wore what might be called a "sawed-off" beaver, and held in his hand, as though afraid to let it go, a carpet-bag of the old-time kind our fathers never knew of as a "grip."

The youth looked about twenty, and his mouth

was wide open as he watched the steamer flying along.

He had already gotten a state-room, and had the key of it, but thought his carpet-bag was safer with him.

A young man pacing up and down the deck in company with an elderly gentleman, smiled as he passed the all-absorbed youth, and said:

"Now, there is real bliss; for that young fellow has seen the town, and is on his way home to tell of his travels.

"I envy that class of men sometimes."

"As I have often done, Gordon; but what a lovely run of it you will have up the river in this pleasant weather, and I envy you your trip, and wish that I was going further up than I am; but don't fail to come in upon your return, Grayhurst."

"No, sir, I will do so," and soon after, Gordon Grayhurst bade his friend good-by as he left the steamer at a landing some thirty miles above the city.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TEMPTATION.

THE steamer sped on her way up the river, night came on, the gong told the passengers that supper was ready, and soon the decks were deserted.

A busy scene followed for an hour in the cabin, when waiters supplied edibles for hungry men, and afterward a few strolled out upon the guards or deck for a quiet smoke.

The tables were cleared away and some passengers began to write letters, others to read, and in the ladies' cabin was heard the sound of music and song.

Forward, in Social Hall, men were grouped about the captain's office and the bar, and as the evening wore on, half a dozen tables or more were set for the pleasure of those who wished to indulge in a fight with fickle Fortune through the medium of cards.

Blackleg Bill and his gang were scattered between three tables, and all readily found people to play with them.

Diamond Jack still paced the deck, cigar between his teeth; and having thrown his weed away, Valentine Gibson entered Social Hall and at once sat down to play upon invitation, and at the table where sat one of Blackleg Bill's ugliest faced companions.

Apart for awhile stood Gordon Grayhurst, and his pale face showed that he was fighting a brave battle with himself against temptation.

"It is in my blood," he mused, "and how hard I find it to resist.

"I know how heavily my father played, and that once he lost nearly all his fortune to that Lawyer Thurston, whom he believed his best friend, and who, but for Dixie Gray, would have robbed Marion and myself of our inheritance.

"I have never played that I have not lost, and yet it seems that luck cannot always go against a man.

"I wonder if I dare risk a few hundred?

"I only wish that I did not have so much money with me, for if I get to losing I forget myself and all.

"No, I will not play!"

"Ah! Mr. Grayhurst, I believe!

"Take my hand, for I am not feeling well.

"I leave you a winning hand, you see, so go in and keep up the luck."

It was one of Blackleg Bill's men that spoke, as he rose from the table.

He had seen the young planter standing there, and so rose on purpose to give his pal, who was his partner, a chance to fleece him.

Thus appealed to, Gordon Grayhurst could not resist temptation.

He had inherited the love of gaming from his father, was tempted and yielded.

So he sat down, took up the cards, made a bet and won.

This he continued to do for some time, while the country youth who was on deck, having filled himself with supper, and frightened the waiter with a fear that he was going to fill his carpet-bag too, for he carried that with him to the table, now stood near, gazing upon the players.

But suddenly, when there was a large stake up, Gordon Grayhurst lost, and nearly all he had won was swept away upon the turn of a card.

A second large stake went the same way, and the young planter was some hundreds out of pocket.

A third stake followed suit, a fourth and the young planter had lost five thousand dollars.

But he was game and did not wince.

Another game was being played, when sud-

denly Gordon Grayhurst laid down his cards, and said very deliberately:

"I will not say that in the other games you have cheated me, so you can keep the money you have won.

"But I do say that just now I caught you slipping a card from your companion on your left, and hence that ends my playing with a Blackleg."

All heard the words uttered, but quicker than a flash the gambler had leveled a revolver and pulled the trigger full in the face of the young planter.

But, just in the second of time his arm was knocked up and the bullet went over his head.

And the one who struck up his arm was the country lad.

At the same instant the other gambler leveled at Gordon Grayhurst who was unarmed, yet never flinched.

But again his life was spared as a shot rang out, and the gambler fell back in his chair a dead man, while Valentine Gibson covered the other with his weapon, and said:

"To cheat a man, for I saw you do it, and then seek to kill him, with two against one is what I will not stand.

"Get out of this cabin, sir, quick!"

The man was caught fairly and cowed.

His companion was dead, and Blackleg Bill who had hastily come from his table was too wise to interfere for he saw that the tide was too strong to stem.

He looked around for the man whom all called his chief.

He entered just then serene and courteous.

"What is the trouble gentleman?"

Valentine Gibson was the one to reply: These two Blacklegs got this gentleman, whom I have not the honor of knowing, into a game, and a last he detected this man, as I did, slipping a card from that one, who is dead.

"He rightly accused him of fraud, and would have been killed but for that country lad who struck up his arm.

"The other drew on him too, and as I saw his act, I killed him.

"If you hold any interest, as it is asserted, in these Blacklegs, you will do well to get them ashore."

These were bold words to address to Diamond Jack.

But the man who uttered them seemed able to back up what he uttered, and he had shown his nerve and aim by shooting one of the Blacklegs between the eyes.

All gazed upon the Gambler King.

But he smiled serenely and replied:

"I have not the honor of your acquaintance, sir, though you appear to know me.

"Did you know me better you would understand that I protect no man who would cheat, or who is coward enough to fire upon an unarmed man.

"That fellow deserved his fate, and I would advise his companions to go ashore with his body at the first landing the steamer makes.

"Now, sir, will you join me in a game of cards, for really I wish to make your better acquaintance?"

Valentine Gibson bowed and said smilingly:

"With pleasure, sir, for the desire for better acquaintance is mutual."

CHAPTER VII.

JACK DIAMOND'S CHALLENGE.

THE fatal scene about the gaming-table, with the two shots, had startled all within hearing.

Those who were writing put away their materials and came forward.

Those who were reading laid aside their books and went quickly to the scene.

Fortunately, with the boomerang of the escape pipes and the rattle of the paddle-wheels the shots had not been heard in the ladies' cabin, and the stained folding-doors cut off a view of Social Hall from the rear of the boat.

The affair had taken but a few minutes, and yet all had felt that Gordon Grayhurst's charge was just, and the fate of one of his assailants, at the hands of the handsome man who had come to his rescue, was deserved.

The young planter got credit for his unflinching nerve in a most trying ordeal, being wholly unarmed, and Valentine Gibson was at once set down as a man who stood no trifling and was dangerous to arouse.

It needed but a word then to turn the fury of the passengers upon the remaining Blacklegs, and this Jack Diamond seemed to understand when he advised them to take their dead comrade ashore at the first landing, and then, to rivet the attention of the crowd, had proposed a game with Valentine Gibson.

As he had seemed to surmise, the dead Blackleg and his friends were forgotten in the interest of seeing those two men play, for the challenge appeared to have been given as a test of nerve and skill.

In his way Diamond Jack was the idol of many, especially of river men, and here was another hero, just as handsome, just as courtly, coming to the front to face him at his own game.

Taking advantage of this interest, Blackleg Bill and his companion slipped out of the nearest gangway with their dead companion.

In the mean time Gordon Grayhurst had turned to the youth and held forth his hand, while he said in a voice full of emotion:

"I have to thank you most sincerely for saving my life, for but for your quick action and pluck I would have been killed."

"I'm glad I did it, though it hain't nothin' ter brag on, for whar I lives we gits used ter cuttin' an' shootin'."

"Well, my friend, we will talk with each other at another time, for now I wish to prevent this other gentleman, who came to my aid also, from playing with a man whom no one can win against, and who got into it on my account."

"You is right thar, but don't yer git him outer git in yerself, fer I thinks them two is better matched," said the youth, and he added:

"Now I'm a-goin' out ter hev a look at ther deader, and if yer wants me my name is Davy Dunn."

"And mine is Gordon Grayhurst, Mr. Dunn," and the planter turned toward the players, while the country youth slipped out of Social Hall.

In the mean while, Diamond Jack had called for a fresh pack of cards, had drawn off his gloves, thrown off his light overcoat, banding it to Black Diamond, his negro valet, and stood with his hand on the back of a chair waiting for Valentine Gibson to be seated.

The latter was equally as courtly, and said:

"Be seated, sir."

"Pardon me, sir, but let me introduce myself as Gordon Grayhurst, a planter, and to extend my hand and friendship with heartfelt gratitude at your kindness to me—nay, your saving my life."

"I shall not forget it, sir."

"Do not speak of it, pray, for I acted as duty prompted, Mr. Grayhurst."

"My name is Gibson, and I trust we shall be friends."

"Now I must accommodate this—this—"

"Gentleman, sir," said Jack Diamond, with a courtly bow.

"Thanks, yes—this gentleman with a game."

"There's a case of diamond cut diamond," muttered Captain C——, of the steamer.

"But I protest, Mr. Gibson, for I was the cause of this challenge from that gentleman, and I should be the one to meet him."

"At another time, Mr. Grayhurst, I am very much at your service."

"I have had the pleasure of playing many a game with your father, and winning, too," and Jack Diamond bowed.

"Ah, yes; I have heard of you, Mr. Diamond, and I will say that my father always spoke well of you; but I think I have a prior claim for this game than Mr. Gibson."

"No, Mr. Grayhurst, the challenge was to me, and I must play," and the two men, as though by common consent, sat down to the table, while all stood around with the deepest interest, for they saw that it was to be a game between giants, men who had both shown their mettle, and who might be called upon to face each other with more than cards in their hands before the evening was over.

Thus refused to be allowed to meet Diamond Jack in place of Valentine Gibson, Gordon Grayhurst could not but remain a silent spectator of what followed.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. DAVY DUNN ALSO PLAYS A GAME.

WHILE this scene was being enacted in the Social Hall of the steamer, one of equal interest was taking place out upon the guards.

Blackleg Bill and his companion had carried their dead comrade to the forward part of the boat, where the trunks of the passengers were piled up high.

Forward of there was a space, and here they had laid him down, while one went to the clerk and got a blanket and rope to tie the body up in, to carry it ashore.

They had also notified the clerk that they would go ashore at the next landing, a small river town some miles above where the steamer then was.

The clerk had complimented them upon their

Doom, remarking that should the games break up in a row, and any passenger be killed, they being found on board, would be dealt with very severely.

They had secured their baggage from their state-rooms, and the two stood talking in a low tone, the dead man lying at their feet, while far ahead glimmered the lights of the town they were nearing.

The deep roar of the escape pipes, the heavy thud of the wheels, with an occasional burst of song from the roustabout below, alone broke the silence of the night.

The moon shone brilliantly and the river looked very beautiful under its mellow light, the scene and all casting a feeling of awe even upon blustering Blackleg Bill.

Suddenly a form approached coming around the pile of trunks, and the two gamblers at once ceased their talking.

"It's that greenhorn fool as knocked up my arm," said Buck Staples in a sullen tone.

"I've a notion to pitch him into the river," Blackleg Bill growled.

All unconscious of their deadly feeling toward him, Davy Dunn came on and halted near, gazing with apparent awe at the blanket-enveloped form on the deck.

"Well, what do you want, Greeny?" demanded Blackleg Bill, angrily.

"Is that the deader?" and he pointed to the body.

"It is."

"It's sure dead?"

"If you had the hole in your head, you would be, too."

Davy Dunn started back, but said:

"Waal, I bain't, and I don't want it, nuther."

"What did yer knock up my friend's hand for to-night when he went to shoot?"

"Cause t'other man had no weapon, and I was afraid they'd hang your friend, maybe."

"Oh, that was it, Greeny."

"My name isn't Greeny."

"What is it? Greenhorn?"

"Nol! It's Davy Dunn."

"Well, you may be Davy, but you are a long way from being *Done*," and the two laughed at the intended pun of Blackleg Bill.

"I'm a long way from home," said Davy.

"Where do you live?"

"Up in the Pine Hills of Mississippi."

"Well, you better go home and stay there."

"That's where I'm a-going."

"Where have you been?"

"To the city."

"My! and the museums didn't catch you?"

"They tried to."

"I guess you are hard to catch."

"Yes, almost as hard as you are; but, you are caught all the same."

"What in thunder do you mean, ye country lout?"

"There lies one of your comrades dead, and you two are going to land at the next town, because you are afraid to stay on this boat—Hold on, I have others right handy if I need them, so don't put your necks in a noose by trying to harm me. I can protect myself also—see?"

He showed that he had a revolver now in each hand, and the two men felt that they had caught a Tartar.

Under the circumstances, of wishing to escape from the boat without again being seen, they were anxious not to attract attention to themselves, while something in the manner of Mr. Davy Dunn told them that he was not the greenhorn he looked.

So they were silent while Davy Dunn continued the talking as follows:

"Now I am quite handy with cards, and my luck is so great that if I were a gambler I'd be called a cheat."

"I watched your game from the first with that young planter, and when he won you played square; but, when he had won all you could spare, you began to cheat."

Blackleg began to move uneasily as if to get nearer the "greeny."

"Oh, ye needn't bristle up now, Mister Gambler. I saw it all. You have just five thousand dollars of his money in your pocket, Blackleg Bill—five thousand dollars—which I want you to give up. That's the point of order now, do ye hear?"

"I'll not do it, you fool. Go away."

"Be careful, don't raise your voice, or you will yet be hanged on this boat, or be thrown over astern with ropes around your necks."

"I repeat, William—I saw you cheat Mr. Grayhurst, and you are to hand me back every dollar you won from him."

"And I say I won't!"

Davy Dunn simply raised one hand, still hold-

ing his revolver, and drew the flap of his coat back.

"Do you see these badges? Well, they mean that I am a detective and special United States officer with authority to arrest a man anywhere in this country."

"If I arrest you, then you, Blackleg Bill, will go back to the Penitentiary you escaped from six years ago in Ohio, and you, Buck Staples, will be wanted in Indiana for safe-breaking."

"Now hand over that money, or I give the signal for my men! There is a whistle in the butt of this revolver; one blast will bring aid; and, if you resist me I will kill you both."

"What is your decision. Speak quick!"

"Take ther durned money!" and Blackleg Bill tossed it at the feet of Davy Dunn.

"Pick that money up and hand it to me, or I'll put a bullet through you—quick!" and the words rung out clear, revealing the voice of Dick Doom, for the young detective it was in the disguise of a countryman.

The desperado Blacklegs, confronted by the man well named Dick Doom, were white with terror and anger.

They were in the presence of a master whose signal call would surely be their doom.

CHAPTER IX. THE DIAMOND DICE.

BLACKLEG BILL felt that he had met more than his match, so stooped and picked up the roll of money.

Had Dick Doom, as the reader now knows the pretended countryman to be, stooped to pick up the roll, it would have been the last act of his life, for a knife would have been driven into his back.

But, he was not to be so caught, and when Blackleg Bill handed him the wad of bills he saw that the youth's revolvers were cocked.

The whistle now blew for the landing, and the young detective said:

"Now get down upon the lower deck and be ready to go ashore when the gangplank is run out."

"Some time we may meet again, and I warn you that cheating don't go on the Mississippi River where you ring yourselves in with gentlemen for a game."

"Take a good look at me so you will know me next time."

"Au revoir," and the young man backed off around the pile of baggage, followed by the muttered curses of the two men.

He went on deck, stood near the captain as he gave his orders, and saw them go ashore, carrying their dead comrade.

"I wish they'd never come on my boat again," said the captain, more to himself than the pretended countryman, who replied:

"Maybe next time they'll go ashore feet first?"

The captain turned and looked at the countryman, said nothing and tapped the bell to back off and go ahead up the river.

Dick Doom still stood gazing at the town, until the boat got well on her way again, then he took up his carpet-bag and walked down to the cabin deck.

There he met the captain again.

"I say, sonny, you stick to that old carpet-bag as though you thought you'd fallen among a den of thieves on this boat?"

"It's safer when I've got hold of it."

"What have you got in it?"

"Lots."

"Well, the clerk will take care of it for you in the office."

"I'll take care of it myself, mister, if it hain't ag'in the law."

The captain laughed and entered the cabin, and a moment after in came the young gentleman who called himself Davy Dunn.

A game, the fifth, had just ended between Jack Dimond and Valentine Gibson, the latter saying:

"Well, sir, you have won all I care to risk tonight."

"Your I. O. U. is perfectly good to me, sir, for any sum," said the gambler.

"You do not know me, sir."

"Only as a stranger in New Orleans who is a gentleman of wealth."

"I will not give my paper, sir, to a stranger," stiffly replied Gibson.

"The captain might oblige you, sir, for he knows you."

"Certainly, Mr. Gibson, if you wish it," said Captain C—.

"Pardon me, sir, but permit me to place my purse in your hands," Gordon Grayhurst said frankly, holding it out as he spoke.

"No, no, I have my limit, thank you, and I have lost a thousand dollars, enough for one evening."

"I will play no more."

"Give me a chance then, mister," and Davy Dunn stepped forward, while all laughed.

Taking no notice whatever of him Jack Diamond said:

"Now, Mr. Grayhurst, I'll oblige you, as you seemed anxious to play awhile since."

"With pleasure, sir."

"But I comes in ahead," persisted Davy Dunn.

"I do not care to play you," coldly said Diamond Jack.

"Is you scared?"

All laughed at this, even to the gambler, and answering his question he said:

"I am afraid of you, I admit."

"Then yer dasn't play me, says I!"

The gambler bit his lips, while the crowd laughed.

"I am to play with a gentleman, Mr. Grayhurst," he said quietly.

"Ah! I'm a gent too, and don't you forget it."

"But I saved that gent's cocoanut from being bored and he is going to let me take his place."

"Much as I would like to oblige you, Mr. Dunn, I feel that I am pledged to play with Dimond," said Gordon Grayhurst in a pleasant way.

"Diamonds?"

"Is that your name?"

"My name is Jack Dimond."

"The Jack o' Diamonds be you?

"Waal, I'll just go a toss up whether it be you, or me, Mr. Grayhurst," said the pretended countryman.

"That is fair, certainly," cried a number of voices.

In fact, the crowd wanted to see the countryman play with Jack Dimond for the fun of it.

Had they seen his game with Blackleg Bill and his pal, Buck Staples, a few minutes before, they would not have thought that there was so much fun in it as they looked for.

"I'll agree to toss for it, then," said Gordon Grayhurst, willing to humor Davy Dunn.

But Jack Dimond tried once more to get rid of him, by saying:

"You are prepared to put up a hundred or so, if you win with Mr. Grayhurst, for I only play for big money?"

"A thousand or so, consarn yer, if I plays," was the energetic answer, to which the gambler responded:

"I believe, after all, you may be worthy of my steel."

"You won't steal from me, and I'll give you a pointer on that," and the gambler again joined in the laugh at his expense.

"Now let me suggest that you throw dice, the highest number in three throws," said Jack Dimond.

"That suits me to a tickle," Davy Dunn replied.

"I am willing," came from Gordon Grayhurst.

"Permit me to offer the dice—my diamond dice," and the gambler took from his pocket three solid gold dice, with the spots on them represented by diamonds set in, very unique and elegant for the use of a man of chance, as Jack Dimond was.

CHAPTER X.

A MAN OF CHANCE.

"OH! but them is purty!"

"Will yer trade 'em?" said Davy Dunn, examining the golden, diamond-studded dice with the greatest admiration.

"They are not for sale," said the gambler.

"Then I'll play yer for 'em."

"I am a man of chance, so never refuse to play for anything," was the answer.

"It's a go."

"What'll it be?"

"Before you decide what you will stake against my diamond dice, first see if you win in your throw with Mr. Grayhurst."

"That's so."

"Let 'em go, friend, best in three tosses," and Davy Dunn handed over the dice to Gordon Grayhurst, while Jack Dimond called to his black valet, and the latter gave to him a gold dice box of rare make, representing a bundle of wheat, with the word "Chance" on one side in diamonds.

"Waal, that are fine," cried Davy Dunn, as he saw the box.

Gordon Grayhurst took the box, put into it the three diamond dice and threw.

"Two sixes and tray—fifteen," called out the gambler.

Gordon Grayhurst threw a second time.

"Two sixes and five—seventeen," sung out Jack Dimond.

Then came the planter's third throw.

"Three sixes—eighteen. Total, fifty.

"A fine record, Mr. Grayhurst.

"Can you beat it, sir?" and the gambler turned to the "young man from the Mississippi Hills."

"I don't know."

"But I'm a-goin' ter try, mister."

He took the box and glanced at it admiringly.

Then he looked over the gold dice, examining them most minutely.

"Are you trying to charm them?" asked Jack Dimond.

"That's just what I'm a-doing, and here goes for three sixes."

"Three sixes—eighteen!" called out the gambler, while the lookers-on applauded.

Davy Dunn took it quietly, blew on the dice, shuffled them in the box and threw a second time.

He did not raise the box, but said:

"I'll go yer a hundred, card-man, that I show up ther sixes."

"I take the bet," was the quick reply of Jack Dimond.

Then he raised the box, and without the movement of a muscle, as though he was not interested in it, the gambler called out in the same tone:

"Three sixes—eighteen!"

Again the lookers-on applauded, and the countryman again took up the dice and box.

He performed certain signs over it, blew in the box, shook it and again threw.

Still he held the dice covered until he said:

"What does yer say, card-man, ter another hundred that they hain't three sixes."

"I'll take your bet."

"Three sixes goes," cried Davy Dunn, as he revealed his throw, and in the same unmoved voice as before the gambler cried:

"Three sixes—eighteen—total fifty-four."

"Mr. Grayhurst you have lost, so I play with this gentleman from 'wayback."

"Yer does fer a fact—thankee, jist two hundred I won from yer."

"I'll put'em in ther game, ag'in' yer diamond dice."

"Two hundred dollars against my dice?" asked the gambler.

"Yes, that's what I said."

"There are four of them and they are of solid gold, with twenty-one diamonds in each one, not to speak of the box of gold and the diamonds that form the word *chance* on it."

"Well, what is ther outfit wu'th?" coolly asked Davy Dunn.

"The cost was two thousand dollars."

"I'm with you," and he thrust his hand into his bosom, hesitated, then said:

"See here, Mister Grayhurst, I like to have forgot, I did; but here's your five thousand dollars that Blackleg winned from you ter-night."

A dead silence fell upon all as he handed over the big roll of money and said:

"Jist see if it hain't all there."

"Where did you get this money?" asked Gordon Grayhurst, excitedly.

"I seen that feller cheat you right along, so when he and t'other feller went out with ther deader, I thought I'd go and ask 'em for ther cash they stole from you by cheating."

"And he gave it to you?"

"Oh, yes, there it is."

"See here, did Black Bill and Buck Staples give up that money to you?"

It was the gambler who asked this question, and his voice was earnest and stern.

"They did it."

"Why?"

"Waal, I'm a kind o' missionary, yer see, and just told 'em of their wicked ways and how wrong it were to cheat a man as trusted 'em for gents, which they was not."

"And they gave up the money."

"There's the money ter speak for itself."

"I don't believe it."

"Maybe Mister Grayhurst knows if it is his money or not?"

"It is, for my bills were all new and crisp, and in just the amounts I see here."

"Then this is the elastic I had about it with the bank stamp on it."

"I don't know how to thank you, sir."

"Don't mention it."

"Now, card man, here goes my money ag'in' yer diamond and gold dice and box."

He placed his money on the table as he spoke,

just two thousand dollars, and it was very evident that he yet had more.

The gambler took the dice from his pocket, four of them this time, and the box, and put them upon the table.

"Now go ahead," said Davy Dunn, and the game was played in silence to the end.

"I thanks yer, mister," said the young man as he raked back his stake, and along with it the gold dice and box.

"You are in luck to-night."

"See, if it will continue," and Jack Dimond showed no sign of regret at his loss as he shuffled the cards for another game.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DISAPPEARANCE.

THE lookers-on were surprised at the remarkable luck of the greenhorn, as all had looked upon him as being.

There he sat at the table playing, his carpet-bag by his feet, his beaver hat pulled down over his eyes, which his green goggles completely hid from view, and his sallow complexion looking as though he had had the jaundice.

His giving over the money won by the Blackleg from the young planter had been a surprise, no one appearing more so than did Jack Dimond.

The latter did not understand how it had been done, for he knew the desperate character of both Blackleg Bill and Buck Staples.

The strange-looking fellow had certainly won the gold box and diamond dice of the gambler, and the later was fretted at the fact, though he did not show it in his countenance.

"Well, sir, what is the amount it will please you to stake against me?" asked Diamond Jack, complacently.

"I've left my two thousand on ther table, and as I hain't no idee o' bein' mean, seeing as how I hain't built that way, I'll just throw ther gold box and diamond dice inter ther pot without your putting up ag'in' them."

"You are certainly generous, but as you risked your two thousand against them, I'll put up a like sum."

"So the game goes for two thousand cash from me and the gold and diamond fixings?"

"Yes, I put up four thousand in cash."

The stakes were put up and the interest now was intense, for the game had begun for very big money, and all knew that Jack Dimond was very much in earnest.

"Are you ready?" asked the gambler.

"Yas, and watchin' yer, so keep yer eye on me for I is devilish sly with keerds, I declare to gracious I is."

"If you can cheat me you are welcome to do so."

"Ditto on your part, Mister Man o' Chance, so here goes."

The cards were shuffled most carefully, dealt and the hands taken up.

The countryman did not even appear to glance at his cards, but kept his eyes upon the gambler with what was really a deliberate stare.

Somehow, for the first time in his life the gambler began to get a trifle nervous, hardly played with his accustomed coolness, and the hand he held was not made the most of.

On the other hand Davy Dunn played with quickness and skill, and said complacently as he raked over the money:

"I'm ridin' a streak o' luck, ter-night."

"And in losing my dice I have lost my luck, so I will play you one more game only, staking my money against the box and dice."

"See here, mister, what is that purty thing on your chain worth?" and Davy Dunn pointed to the chain, a diamond five-point star upon one side and upon the other a hand holding four aces, the spots being of rubies and black pearls.

"This is worth even more than the box and dice, but I'll chance it against them to win them back."

"It's a go."

Not a sound was heard about the table.

Who was this green-looking youth that played like a professional gambler and had the nerve to risk thousands on the turn of a card?

He seemed as unmoved as though not in the game, and the box and dice were put on the table, while the gambler unfastened the magnificent triquet, which was hung on a pivot of two points of the star by two miniature gold rabbit's feet.*

The charm was much admired, as it was laid upon the table with the remark by the gambler:

"I told you I was a Man of Chance."

* All superstitious persons believe there is great virtue in a rabbit's foot worn as a charm.

-THE AUTHOR.

"And I was born for luck," was Davy Dunn's reply.

Then the game was begun and each one played carefully and skillfully.

"You have won, and that is my last game this night," said Jack Dimond, rising from the table.

The successful player calmly pocketed the dice, put the box in a secret receptacle about his spacious coat, fastened the star upon his watch-chain and rose from the table.

He grasped his carpet-bag as he did so, and said:

"Good-night, gents, I'll see yer at feeding time in the morning I reckon, for I'm a-going ter full run and come back ter my landing, fer maybe I kin find somebody else as wants ter pick me up fer a greeny."

"Good-night, all."

And carpet-bag in hand he started along the cabin for his state-room.

He was seen to halt, unlock the door and enter, and then the crowd began to discuss him.

The gambler had taken a drink with Gordon Grayhurst, after which he lighted a cigar and went on deck, and soon all began to drop out of Social Hall to their state-rooms.

But the next morning at breakfast the strange player did not appear, and when Gordon Grayhurst asked for him later, it was found that he had not been seen.

His guard door was unlocked, there was his carpet-bag, the bed had been slept in, and yet at the two landings made during the night he had not been seen to go ashore.

The captain too said that he had an envelope of money of the stranger's in the safe.

What his strange disappearance meant no one could at first comprehend, but soon it began to be rumored about the steamer that he had been foully dealt with.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERY UNSOLVED.

GORDON GRAYHURST had sought out the strange character, who had come to his rescue, the next morning to thank him more heartily for what he had done.

He felt that the act of the supposed countryman, in striking up the revolver of the Blackleg, had saved his life, while he also owed to him every dollar he had lost, which had been returned to him.

So he had sought him out to have a talk with him and find out just who and what he was.

But the waiters said they had not seen Mr. Davy Dunn that morning.

He had not been to breakfast, and an inquiry at the office showed that nothing there was known of him.

He had been seen by the bootblack to go on deck, after the hour he had gone to his room, and that was all that could be found out regarding him.

Then the clerk and Gordon Grayhurst went to his room.

It was locked on the inside, and they went to the door opening out on the guard near the wheelhouse.

This was open.

That the occupant had retired the bed showed, and there was his cravat, collar and carpet-bag, which showed that he had not gone ashore at any of the landings.

Search was at once made for him, but nowhere could he be found.

This looked suspicious.

His affair with the Blacklegs was recalled, and also the fact that he had plenty of money, the diamond dice, and gold box, the diamond star and his own watch and chain.

It looked like a case of murder for revenge or money.

Then the thoughts of some turned upon Jack Dimond.

He was known never to rise until dinner, which was at one o'clock on the Mississippi steamers.

But he was called and told of the mysterious disappearance of the stranger.

He saw at a glance that he was under suspicion, so said in his cool way:

"Of course, this reflects upon me; but the last I saw of him was when he left us in the cabin.

"I went on deck and smoked for an hour, then turned in, and that is all I know about it.

"Are you sure he did not go ashore at some landing?"

"He was not seen to do so; and besides, would he leave his cravat, collar and carpet-bag, not to speak of a package of money that he had in the safe?" said Valentine Gibson.

"That settles it, then, that he has been foully dealt with, but by whom?"

That is the question we are determined to find out," said Gordon Grayhurst, firmly.

"Have any passengers come on board during the night?" asked Jack Dimond.

They went to the captain's office to find out.

"Yes," said the clerk, looking over his books. "A clergyman came aboard at Baton Rouge."

"That's the fellow I heard praying aloud next to me, I'll wager a hundred on," said Jack Dimond.

"Yes, he was put in the state-room next to you, Mr. Dimond," the clerk said.

"What have you against me, Butler, for that fellow woke me from a sound sleep, and when I called to him to postpone his prayer until next Sunday, he coolly began to pray for my lost soul," and all laughed at the gambler's words.

"Any one else come on board, Mr. Butler?" asked Gordon Grayhurst.

"An old gentleman and his wife at Bayou Sara, sir."

"No one of a suspicious nature?"

"Not any one, sir."

"Then the one who has wronged that poor fellow we have to look for on this boat," firmly said Gordon Grayhurst.

"Yes, it was some one who was aboard and knew the circumstances of his having considerable money and valuables," Jack Dimond remarked.

Then he added:

"I will pay one thousand dollars' reward to find him, or his murderer, if he is murdered."

"And I will pay the same sum for information regarding him," Gordon Grayhurst said.

"And the boat will add another reward," said the clerk.

"Pray call upon me for my quota to a subscription for a reward," Valentine Gibson remarked.

Then the latter and Gordon Grayhurst walked on deck together to discuss the situation.

They talked together for some time, and could only arrive at the conclusion that the strange young man had been murdered, robbed, and his body, in the darkness, thrown overboard to prevent discovery of the crime.

Whom to suspect was the question.

"I certainly do not suspect Jack Dimond, in spite of the fact that he would feel bitterly toward him, for he is above such a thing in my opinion," Gordon Grayhurst said.

"And in mine."

"No, the man is one of the Blackleg gang, and to pick him out is the thing to be done."

"Well, Mr. Gibson, I am certainly glad to have the pleasure of meeting you, and I most surely owe to you my life."

"I trust we shall be friends, and when we return to New Orleans, for I believe you make that your home now, I shall be most happy to have you visit me at The Ferns."

"I shall be honored, Mr. Grayhurst, I assure, and also glad to avail myself of your kind invitation—ah! here comes the parson, I guess, who prayed for Diamond Jack's soul," and as he spoke the person referred to came on deck and walked with solemn mien toward the two gentlemen who were observing him.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PARSON ON HIS METTLE.

THE one who approached Gordon Grayhurst and Mr. Gibson, as they stood together on the steamer's deck, was one of those solemn, sleek-looking individuals we often find in the ministry, of that stripe who are opposed to everything except prayer and alms-taking.

He was dressed in a suit of severe black, of the most pronounced ecclesiastical cut, wore a snowy collar and necktie, had gray hair worn long, a fringe of gray whiskers running out from his neck over his collar, *a la Horace Greeley*, and had gold-rimmed spectacles, with double glasses in them, as though he was very near-sighted, a belief that was carried out by his squinting in a painful manner.

His mouth was drawn down at the corners to a Salvation Army expression, while there was a certain high coloring of the nose which, but for his cloth, would have suggested a very free use of the coloring liquid known as "old rye."

His hat was highly polished, his step slow, and had he been gotten up as a scarecrow for sinners he could not have suited the character better.

He bowed as he approached the two gentlemen, and said in a voice that was sepulchral, and had a tearful whine in it:

"Good-morning, my friends.

"Providence has vouchsafed us a glorious day, for which we should all give thanks."

"Did you hear of the murder last night?" abruptly responded Valentine Gibson.

"The murder!" and the parson started back with a look of horror.

"Yes, a poor young man was robbed and murdered on this boat last night, and all suspicious characters are to be searched and held."

"It was about the time that you came on board, I think, sir."

The parson looked pained, and replied:

"It is sad to feel that the life of any man should be taken, that he should go unrepentant, with his sins unforgiven, and I beg you, my friends, who may be the next to go, to turn—"

"Yes, we'll go now," and slipping his hand in Gordon Grayhurst's arm, Valentine Gibson led him away from the parson, who stood gazing after them with a positive look of woe upon his face.

"I despise a canting fellow like that," said Grayhurst, in disgust.

"That is why I cut his sermon to us short."

"And yet just such men often have great influence with people."

"He may have his virtues, but I could not tolerate him."

All during the day the two newly-made friends were together, and appeared to take a great fancy for each others' society.

Both talked well, and though the senior by some years, Valentine Gibson liked to encourage his younger friend to converse about himself.

Frank, and of a noble nature, Gordon Grayhurst soon made known the story of his life, and how he enjoyed living upon his plantation, the home of his ancestors for generations.

"My sister is a mere child yet, but sixteen, and yet she is as clever a companion as I could wish."

"She is home for the vacation now, for she attends Madame Henri's boarding-school in New Orleans, so you really must come up to see us when you can find time," said Gordon.

The two dined together that day, chatted during the afternoon, and when night came seemed instinctively to wend their steps toward the Social Hall of the steamer.

Several times had the parson attempted to join them, but they had eluded him most skillfully, and Gibson had sent him after Jack Dimond with the remark:

"Now there is a man you should convert, for he is an abominable sinner, I assure you."

"What is he, friend?"

"A gambler."

The parson raised his hands in horror, muttered something and made a bee-line for Diamond Jack who was seated forward smoking.

The encouragement he met must have been considerable, for he remained a long while in conversation with the gambler.

When supper was over and the tables set in Social Hall for those who wished to play, quite a crowd had gathered, evidently anticipating another game between the gambler and Gibson, or with Gordon Grayhurst.

The mysterious disappearance of the countryman, Dave Dunn, had been the universal topic of conversation during the day, and had cast a gloom over all on the steamer, for no one seemed to doubt but that he had been killed and thrown overboard during the hours of the night.

The clerk had said he had made his report to hand over to the authorities at New Orleans upon his return, and would state that he believed a murder had been committed.

Assembling in Social Hall when night came the missing man was again the subject of conversation, and there was little doubt regarding Jack Dimond's being strongly suspected as his murderer.

When he came in from his smoke upon the deck every eye was upon him, and a number had gone to the captain and stated that they thought he should hold the gambler and not allow him to leave the boat at the landings.

"That is all arranged for, gentlemen," was the cautious reply of Captain C—, and more he would not say.

"Well, Mr. Grayhurst, what do you say to a game to-night?" said Jack Dimond, as he came up to where the young planter sat with Valentine Gibson.

"I am wholly at your service, sir," was the reply, and the two sat down at a table and cards were brought.

Then suddenly from his corner arose the parson, and loudly he said:

"I protest, gentlemen!

"I will not brook the insult to my gray hairs and my sacred calling, of allowing any game of cards to be played in my presence."

"I say no!" and the parson squared himself as though ready to knock out any sinner who dared oppose him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PARSON WINS.

THE excitement caused by the unexpected act of the parson was intense.

Some laughed, a few jeered, many encouraged him to stick to his determination to down the sin of gambling, and others were silent.

Gordon Grayhurst looked both confused and annoyed, while Valentine Gibson was cynical.

The gambler showed that he was angry, for his eyes flashed and he bit his lips.

Then, as quiet once more reigned, the deep, melodious voice of Jack Dimond was heard:

"Your name is Shepherd, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, and I am a shepherd trying to lead lost sheep back to the fold."

"Well, sir, you should have nothing to do with wolves, so pray do not interfere with me."

"I will interfere. I will not see you, Man of Chance that you are, inveigle that youth into a game to lose his fortune and imperil his soul."

"I tell you, sir, that you shall not play while I am on this boat."

Jack Dimond's face became very pale, but he said in the same unmoved voice:

"If it were not for your white hair and your being a clergyman, I would drag you through that gangway and throw you into the Mississippi."

All started at this threat of the gambler, for they knew that he was a man to be feared when his anger was aroused.

The parson never winced, but stepping close up to the irate gamester laid his hand upon his shoulder, while he bent over and whispered in his ear:

"As you threw that poor youth into the river last night?"

Jack Dimond's face turned perfectly livid, his eyes glared, his lips moved, but he uttered no word.

What he had said to the gambler reached the ears of but two other persons, Gordon Grayhurst and Valentine Gibson.

They were positively startled by what they heard, and the parson stepping back said in his same denunciating style of speaking:

"Now will you play your game of chance tonight, gentlemen or not?"

"I certainly do not wish to do aught to wound the tender sensibilities of the reverend gentleman," said Gordon Grayhurst.

"Hence I will not play."

"Well said, young man, well said," Parson Shepherd remarked.

All eyes now turned upon the gambler who remarked with a sneer:

"As the sentiment seems to be in favor of a Salvation Army seance, I pass too, and will withdraw to the companionship of one whose society I never tire of—myself."

He put up the cards with no sign of excitement now in face or manner, and rising said:

"Parson, I am open to conviction and conversion, so if you care to talk with me you will find me on the upper deck near the bell, my favorite seat."

With this the gambler strode out of Social Hall, while the parson said:

"I never allow a sinner to escape, so will talk to him while he is in the humor."

And the parson also left the Social Hall, while Valentine Gibson said:

"Mr. Grayhurst, did you hear what he whispered to Jack Dimond?"

"I did, and I was amazed."

"He seemed to strike dead center with his random shot, if it was fired at random, which I very much doubt."

"You think he knows something?"

"I think that parson is not the fool he looks."

"I had the same opinion."

"Now, he may have come on board before Davy Dunn disappeared, and so might have seen some cause to bring suspicion upon Dimond."

"It would seem so."

"But did you note the face of Jack Dimond?"

"Oh, yes, it became perfectly livid."

"And he evidently wanted to talk with the parson, from what he said."

"Beyond all doubt."

"Let us see who the man is."

They went to the office and asked the clerk to let them look over the steamer's register.

There they saw the cramped, schoolboy chirography of the countryman, written as follows:

"DAVY DUNN,
Miss."

After a few other names came that of:

"REV. ARIEL SHEPHERD.
Nashville, Tenn."

They could make no more out of this than what they saw, and as they felt sure there

would be no card playing that night on board, after the bombshell which the Reverend Ariel Shepherd had thrown into the midst of the card-players, they decided to go on deck for a walk.

They then saw the gambler seated forward, and near him was the reverend gentleman, the two evidently being engaged in very earnest conversation.

There was a moon, in its second quarter, and the night was most inviting to remain on deck, so the two friends paced up and down toward the stern of the steamer for a long while, for they did not wish the gambler and the parson to think they were watching them.

The moon had set before they at last decided to retire, and as they went forward to descend to the cabin, they still saw the gambler and Reverend Shepherd conversing together.

"There is something strange in all that, Grayhurst, for that gambler is not a man to be bored by that man without he has some hold upon him."

"So I think, for surely the parson cannot be converting him from the error of his way," and Gordon Grayhurst laughed.

"If he does it will be a miracle, for Jack Dimond is said to be one who fears neither Heaven, Hades or man."

"Yes, such is the record I have heard that he bore, for my father often spoke of him to me; but see, Social Hall is deserted, and I will say good-night."

"Good-night, and we will meet at breakfast."

CHAPTER XV.

THE FAT PASSENGER.

WHEN the two friends met at breakfast there was a surprise for them, for it was going the rounds of the passengers that Jack Dimond the gambler had left the steamer during the night, going ashore at Vicksburg.

It was also said that the parson had landed at Vicksburg, also, and people wondered at both departures, for Jack Dimond had been booked for "Memphis and return," and the Reverend Shepherd had said that he was going on up to the end of the steamer's run.

Why the gambler and the clergyman should leave together was something that could not be understood by any one.

"What do you think of it, Grayhurst?" asked Mr. Gibson.

"I hardly know; but I thought that the captain was to detain Jack Dimond, on account of the suspicion cast upon him of having murdered Dunn."

"So I understood; but let me tell you what I heard."

"Well?"
That neither the parson nor the gambler went ashore at Vicksburg."

"Can this be possible?"
It would seem so, for I heard one of the passengers say that he could not sleep, so got up, dressed, and went and took a seat forward.

While there the steamer ran in to land at Vicksburg, her lights were in full blaze, and he sat near the gangway steps, and saw who went ashore and came on board.

"He did not see the parson or the gambler?"
"No, he did not."

"That is strange."
Passing strange; but there is a comical-looking duck!" and Gibson nodded toward a youth who was coming along the deck toward them.

He had a red face, and his hair was of almost carmine hue, so fiery red it was.

His head seemed too small for his body, and a Derby hat sat upon it down to his ears, being a size too large for him.

He was what might be called a fat boy, and yet his sack-coat and pants were too large for him.

The boy could not have been over sixteen, and appeared to make the best of life.

He caught a fly as he came along, and put it in a bottle he took from his pocket.

Then, with a sheer spirit of mischief he found impossible to resist, he changed the tags on several of the trunks, so that the owners would get them mixed.

A parrot swinging in a cage attracted his attention next, and near him hung a bunch of bananas.

Again was he tempted, and after eating four-fifths of a banana, the one-fifth remaining was given to the parrot.

"Good boy," said the bird.
Complimented by this the boy cribbed another banana, and the parrot did not get the lion's share.

But he repeated his compliment, hoping in

time to get at least as much as one banana, and he seemed to have taken in the size of the boy, so considered that he would be able to hold the entire bunch.

But the boy went and got another banana, and standing in front of the cage, ate it all.

The parrot ruffled his feathers and looked uneasy, but when the boy laughed at him he became insulted, and his language showed that he could be forcible as well as polite, for he said very decidedly:

"Bad boy—d— bad!"

This tickled the boy and he did not leave the parrot until he had him swearing like a sailor.

Of course both Gordon Grayhurst and Valentine Gibson were amused at the exhibition they had witnessed, and the latter determined to draw the youth into conversation, so said:

"Do you know when we will reach Memphis, sir?"

"Naw."

"You are going there, I suppose?"

"If the boat don't blow up."

"You are not anticipating such a catastrophe?"

"I dunno, boilers often bu'st, and I've heard the one in this boat was leaky," and the boy was happy in giving the two men a scare, as he thought.

"I think I saw you come on board at Vicksburg?"

"That's where I live."

"Do you remember seeing a minister go ashore at Vicksburg?"

"Yes, he went ashore as I come on."

"Ah! and was he alone?"

"There was a fellow with him."

"What style of man was he?"

"Well, he was dressed to kill, and wore diamonds galore."

"Thank you; and they remained ashore at Vicksburg?"

"I guess so, as I didn't see them come on again."

The boy now spied a passenger asleep in a chair.

Instantly he took a box from his pocket containing a white powder, rubbed it on his hand, put it back, and moved on the enemy.

Tripping purposely over a cuspidor, he slapped his powdered hand full on the back of the nodding passenger, awakening him with a start of fright.

"Excuse me, mister, I tumbled," he said, innocently, and went on his way, while in the center of the passenger's back was the white imprint of his spread hand.

Both Gordon Grayhurst and Gibson were convulsed with laughter, and the former said:

"Well, that boy has got more deviltry in him to the square inch than any one I ever saw."

"Somebody will kill him yet."

"No fear of that, for he is too sharp to be caught."

"Did you notice his face, that in spite of his fat cheeks and red face he was really handsome?"

"Yes, I observed that; but you heard what he said about the gambler and the parson?"

"Yes, they went ashore after all, and escaped the gaze of the passenger who said that they had not."

"I wish I knew how it was the parson could drive Jack Dimond off of this boat."

"So do I," was Gordon Grayhurst's response.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PARSON MAKES A POINT.

WHEN Jack Dimond left the Social Hall, after his discomfiture at the hands of the Reverend Shepherd, he dashed off a drink of brandy and soda at the bar, lighted a cigar, and walked out upon the guard.

He stood there a minute, glancing in through the glass windows, and seeing that the parson was coming he went upon deck.

There were always a dozen or more easy-chairs forward, near the huge bell of the steamer, and now none of them were occupied.

Jack Dimond seated himself in one, and a moment after a step resounded behind him and Reverend Ariel Shepherd stood by his side.

"A fine night, brother," said the clergyman.

"Be seated," was the somewhat blunt response of the gambler.

"Oh, certainly."

"Thanks."

And the parson drew his chair very close to the gambler, who could not move further away, as the bell-rope was almost touching him.

"A fine night, sir."

"I have not said that it was not, sir."

"True, very true; but I should think you

would avoid sitting alone with your conscience, my friend."

"And why, pray?"

"On account of the memories the weird, grim phantom the sight of that river must call up from its depths."

"I am surely at a loss to comprehend you."

"And did you not comprehend my words to you in the cabin?"

"What were they?"

"My whispered words."

"Ah, yes, I recall that you made a charge against me in a whisper which you dared not make aloud."

"Come with me to the cabin and I will repeat the charge, and aloud."

"Do you dare accuse me of the murder of that youth?"

"Of course I do."

"How dare you have the brazen effrontery to tell me so to my face?"

"I have not made the charge behind your back, as others have."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, nine-tenths of the people on this boat believe that you murdered Davy Dunn."

"I murdered him?"

"Yes."

"They are fools."

"They don't think that they are."

"Why should I kill him?"

"Why?"

"Yes."

"For the best of reasons."

"Name them."

"Well, you are a man who has played cards with such continued good fortune for years, that you have been suspected of cheating."

"Who says so?"

"What are you to know about such things?"

"I have ears, and have heard men talk."

"Well, no one has ever accused me of cheating."

"You are mistaken."

"Who did?"

"Hugh Dunwoodie."

"Ah! he did claim that I played an unfair game."

"And you shot him?"

"I had to uphold my honor."

"Your honor?"

"So I said."

"Well, your honor we will not discuss, but you were accused again at cheating."

"Who was my accuser?"

"Vanloo Buckner."

"Yes, so be did."

"Did you avenge your honor in his case?"

"Not then; I gave him back all I had won from him and challenged him."

"Well?"

"We went ashore at a landing and fought a duel."

"With what result?"

"I killed him of course."

"And you recall no one else who charged you to your face with cheating?"

"Yes, one other."

"Where is he?"

"I do not know."

"What was his name?"

"Stanton Buckner, I believe."

"And why did you not kill him?"

"He was quicker than I thought, covered me with his revolver and I was searched by the crowd."

"With what result?"

"It was shown that I had not played with two packs, and marked cards as he accused me of doing."

"Well?"

"He left the steamer that night, and I never met him again."

"Is that true?"

"Do you accuse me of lying?"

"No, of forgetting."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that some weeks after Stanton Buckner took passage on a steamer which you were on board of as a passenger."

"He came on board at night, entered the cabin and seeing you passed on to his state-room."

"The next morning he was not found on board, and no one knew what had become of him."

"His clothes and baggage were in his state-room, and as he happened to be a somnambulist it was supposed that he had gotten up in his sleep and going out on the guards had fallen overboard."

"Yes, I remember the excitement it occasioned at the time."

"No doubt, but do you recall that there was

do one on that steamboat who knew of your quarrel with Stanton Buckner some weeks before that?

"It was not the same steamer, and so no one connected your being on board with his disappearance."

"Why should they?"

"They should for the reason that you were his foe, for he had humiliated you, disgraced you upon the other steamer by his charge, even though it was not proven, and you bided your time to get rid of him."

"Do you accuse me of killing that man?" savagely demanded the gambler, as he wheeled upon the parson.

But the parson was wholly unmoved as he answered:

"Yes, Diamond Jack, I do accuse you of killing Stanton Buckner in his state-room, and then throwing his body into the river."

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT THE REVEREND SHEPHERD SAW.

THERE was that in the look of Diamond Jack, as he turned his fierce eyes upon the parson, which showed a desire to end his life then and there.

But the parson did not flinch, and what the moonlight revealed in his face caused the gambler to utter an impatient exclamation, lean back in his seat and say:

"Well, of all men, parson, you are the most brazen I ever met."

"Think so?"

"I know it."

"Now my congregation don't—"

"D— your congregation!"

"Ah! would you swear?"

"I have just done so."

"Wicked man, and before me?"

"I have no respect for you."

"Now that is just what I thought."

"You came on this boat and sneaked about listening to idle tales about me."

"Then you came to the Social Hall, where no man of your cloth should be seen, and you broke up a game of cards I was going to play with a friend."

"Mr. Grayburst your friend?"

"Yes, as his father was before him, for the colonel has played man a game of cards with me."

"To his sorrow, I take it."

"Yes, he lost in the long run, though he was a good player."

"And his son?"

"We were going to play last night when a countryman interfered and I played him instead."

"And won?"

"No, I didn't, for he nearly ruined me."

"Too bad."

"And that is the man you killed?"

The gambler did not start at this bold question, but replied:

"It is the man you say you heard some idiots say I killed."

"So you did not have a game with Mr. Grayburst?"

"No, but I will."

"I doubt it."

"Why?"

"He will not play with you."

"And why will he not?"

"Well, I shall advise him not to do so."

"And you tell me this?"

"I do."

"You will advise him not to play with me?"

"Of course."

"Why?"

"I shall tell him that you are a cheat."

"You will have to prove your words."

"I can do so."

"How?"

"Never mind, I can prove that you play with marked cards, cards made expressly for you, and which mark not another soul knows."

"It is false!"

"It is true, and more, you are really the leader of the Blacklegs of the Mississippi."

The gambler laughed.

"It is false!" he said, after awhile.

"And I say that it is true."

"Where is your proof?"

"You shall have it all in good time."

"If my cards are marked, why was it that the countryman won from me?"

"Davy Dunn?"

"Yes."

"Well, he did not play with your cards."

"He did."

"You are mistaken, for he is as clever as you are, in handling the pasteboards, and so ex-

changed the marked cards for a pack just like them excepting your secret signs."

"This is not true."

"Whether it is or not his cards and yours can be examined together to verify my charge against you."

"Well, have you done with your charges?"

"I wish to return to the death of Stanton Buckner, and state that you entered his state-room with a skeleton key, chloroformed him while asleep, took his body around by the wheelhouse and tossed it overboard."

The gambler laughed.

"The remembrance seems to amuse you, of the manner in which you got rid of your victim."

"It is so perfectly absurd."

"Is it?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that the body of the dead man was found?"

"It never was."

"It was picked up on the shore of a planter, who happened to be a physician as well as a soldier."

"He examined the body carefully, divested it and discovered that the lungs showed chloroform in them, and that death had not come from drowning."

"The body was buried on his plantation, and as he was just starting for an extended trip North, he merely reported the finding of the dead man, the name upon his night-shirt, and that he had placed him in his own burying-ground."

"When he returned home he did not revive the matter by stating that he had discovered that the man was murdered, or had committed suicide."

"You seem to be well acquainted with the affair?"

"I am."

"And to have meddled much in my affairs?"

"I have."

"Did you ever stop to consider what it might lead to?"

"No."

"Well, I suppose you would like to know?"

"Yes, being forewarned is being forearmed."

"Well, it might lead to your death."

"It might, but I doubt it."

"You seem to have no dread of it?"

"Don't turn to see if those in the pilot-house can see you, for they cannot, as the moon is going down, and the two gentlemen who were walking the deck awhile since have retired."

"But let me tell you what I saw last night."

"What did you see?"

"A man called from his state-room and dealt a blow over his head, which felled him to the deck."

"Then the murderer bent over him, search his clothes, and raising the body throw it over the guard into the river."

"Then the murderer went to his victim's state-room, searched it and found—nothing!"

"The victim was the country youth, and the murderer was yourself—hold! I have you covered, Jack Dimond, and more, here are steel bracelets for your wrists—there! they clasp on easily, you see!"

"Now, come with me, Diamond Jack, to the deck below. A movement to resist, or a word, will be the signal for your death," warned the parson in a low, determined tone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SECRET.

WITH the skill of a pickpocket the parson had, while talking to Jack Dimond, slipped the revolver out of the holster on one hip, his knife from the other.

He had also been toying with a pair of steel manacles later on, and when at last he had decided to act, he had slipped, with lightning rapidity, the steels upon his wrists and snapped them.

Thus entrapped, and with a revolver looking him fairly in the eyes, the gambler had not dared offer any resistance.

He had felt that he had been disarmed most cleverly, and caught with equal cleverness.

He could do nothing else than obey his unknown captor.

He was led down to the deck below, out on the guards to the office window, upon which the parson tapped.

The clerk shoved the glass aside.

"The keys of state-rooms 13 and 15, please, Mr. Butler."

"Yes, sir," and the keys were handed out.

It was evident that the captain and clerk both knew the parson.

Passing on along the outer guard, the parson led his prisoner to Number 15.

Unlocking the door, he bade him enter, and then lighted a candle.

There was seen to be a door communicating with the next state-room, Number 13, and a trunk was visible in there.

Upon the bed in Number 15 was a chain and padlock, and this was placed around the headboard and made fast through the manacles upon the gambler's wrists.

"You have space to undress and move about, sir, and the state-room on each side of you is unoccupied, but I shall take one, so as to keep an eye upon you."

"In Heaven's name, who are you?"

"Do you recognize this?"

He unbuttoned his coat as he spoke, and revealed the gambler's diamond star.

"My God!"

"I do not wonder that you are amazed."

"Shall I tell you how I got it?"

"Yes."

"I won it."

"Won it?"

"Yes."

"How and when and where?"

"From you."

"It is false."

"Don't be too certain."

"But I am."

"Let me tell you that you made a very sad mistake."

"How?"

"You did not kill your man."

"What man?"

"Davy Dunn."

The gambler, in spite of his position of peril and captivity laughed.

"I repeat it, you did not kill him."

"Who says that I tried to do so?"

"I say so."

"You pretended to have seen me fell him to the deck."

"I did see it."

"It is false."

"You went to his door, the outer one, and had on a waiter's jacket and black handkerchief tied over your face."

"You called him to the door and told him in a whisper that you feared the steamer was on fire."

"He stepped out, dressed as he was, and you dealt him what you intended should be a deadly blow."

"But he had in his bat a wire frame, and it saved him, though the blow stunned him."

"You searched him and found nothing."

"He was too smart for you there."

"You threw him overboard, and then searched his state-room for your gold box, diamond dice, this star I wear and his money."

"You failed to find anything."

"Then you sought your state-room."

"But the cold water revived him, and he began to swim."

"He saw the steamer going rapidly away from him, but she had been running very close inshore, so he had but a short distance to swim to reach it."

Fortunately he found a residence near where he landed, and aware that the steamer was running around one of the bends for which this river is noted, he felt that he could get a horse and by riding ten miles head her off at the town above, and which she had to go forty miles to reach.

"He got some clothes from the people, a man to drive him to the town and started."

"He reached the town ahead of the steamer, and when she landed went on board."

"He made his way to his state-room and found it unlocked."

"But that was not the only state-room he had on board, for he came prepared for emergencies."

"Do you follow me, Jack Dimond?"

"Go on."

"I was sure that my story would interest you."

"Go on, I say."

"Well, he left his things in the state-room, to give coloring to the belief he knew would prevail, and very justly, that he had been murdered."

"Go on with the well-concocted story you were telling."

"There is no more to tell."

"Why not?"

"Well, because Davy Dunn intends to keep you in hiding, carry you a prisoner back to New Orleans, and deliver you up to the chief of police there."

"Davy Dunn, you say?"

"Yes, or in other words, myself; for *I am Dick Doom, the detective, alias Davy Dunn, alias Parson Ariel Shepherd!*" was the startling response that fell upon the ears of Diamond Jack, the gambler of the Mississippi.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN IMP OF MISCHIEF.

"*THAT* chump will get himself into trouble yet," said Valentine Gibson to Gordon Grayhurst, for the two had become inseparable now.

He alluded to the fat youth, who seemed to exist simply for his own satisfaction, independent of all others.

His pranks were not for show, apparently, for he went about everything in a business way, turning from one piece of mischief to another just as he might attend to duties devolving upon him.

He was the first one at the table when meals were announced, and the last to leave it.

If a tempting morsel was brought his next neighbor, he appropriated it when the other's face was turned, and looked as innocent as a baby.

Gordon and Gibson found real delight in following him up and watching him.

He took the most comfortable seat out on the guards, left it, and the man who then sat down in it got up with great suddenness, accompanied by a howl of pain, for a bent pin had been left there.

The fat boy was inside the cabin watching the result, and as soon as accomplished to his satisfaction smiled blandly and walked away.

He got the parrot good and mad, tortured him into profanity and then hung him back by the ladies' cabin where he swore like the army in Flanders.

The next thing he spied was an Italian organ-grinder with a monkey, upon the deck below.

The Italian went to sleep and the fat boy made friends with the monkey, gave him a few nickels, some cake and candy, lowering all to him with a rope which he took from around a trunk.

Then he got the monkey to catch hold of the rope end and hauled him up to the cabin deck.

He was happy then and went on a search for mischief.

He found a negro waiter asleep on the guard, and sat the monkey near him on the floor.

Then he put an orange on the negro's head and said:

"Get it, monk!"

The monkey obeyed with promptness, sprung upon the negro's lap and grabbed at the orange, awaking the sleeping waiter who gave a yell of terror.

The monkey skurried along the guards in fright, the fat boy after him, and finding a door of a lady's state-room open went in.

The boy closed the door and then went into the cabin and sat down.

The Italian then had the whole lower deck in a state of excitement over the loss of his "monk."

"Ma monka gone! ma poor gooda monka."

"He gooda monka, name Garibaldi—

"I give five dolla to find ma monka."

This encouraged a general search, but no one seemed to be able to get the reward.

The boy meanwhile sat in the cabin awaiting developments.

Supper was over and he seemed to understand that the owner of the state-room must soon retire.

He had read aright, for his patience was rewarded, as well as were Gordon Grayhurst and Gibson for waiting, for suddenly a series of unearthly yells were heard and out dashed what appeared at first to be a ghost.

But it was a lady of uncertain age, one who came in the category of old maids.

She had disrobed to retire, and wearing a wig had laid it aside with her false teeth, when suddenly she received a tap on the shoulder and then beheld the monkey in her bed.

The scene that followed was indescribable, and out she dashed among the passengers, the monkey close at her heels.

But the monkey was frightened and darted down the cabin toward the forward part of the boat, spied the fat boy and leaped into his arms.

"Poor monk, did she scare you?

"Come, your master wants you, five dollars' worth, so I'll take you to him."

The boy arose, and convulsed with laughter the two friends followed.

Down the gangway steps he went and soon found the Italian.

The latter rushed to seize his monkey, but the fat boy said:

"No money, no monk."

"Five dollars."

With a sigh the Italian drew out his bag of money and counted out five dollars.

"Now play for this," and the boy handed him back two dollars.

His next move was to call upon the roustabouts to dance, and he found six of them, each of whom got a half dollar each.

And with no thought more than that he had been most liberally paid to play, not taking into consideration that he had been paid out of his own money, the Italian played and played, while the roustabouts danced and danced.

The boy enjoyed it as long as he could, and then went on deck.

There he saw the water buckets all in a row and filled, in case of fire.

One of them was lifted and down went the contents on the Italian and his monkey, another following on the roustabouts.

The fat boy had had enough of music and dancing so broke it up in his own way.

Italian profanity, the screams of the monkey, echoing oaths on the part of the parrot, with loud yells of laughter from the deck hands made a perfect pandemonium for a while.

Then it was that Gibson had said that the boy would yet get into trouble.

But the steamer arrived at Memphis the next morning and the fat boy bobbed up serenely all safe.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FAT BOY HOLDS TRUMPS.

BOTH Gordon Grayhurst and Valentine Gibson decided to return upon the steamer to New Orleans.

The fat boy had told them that he was going to do the same, so they felt sure the run down the river would not be tedious.

Complaints innumerable had been made to the captain about the pranks of the fat boy, but Captain C— merely promised that he should be taken in hand, and laughed silently at the fun of the young passenger.

The fat boy concluded to remain upon the steamer, and not go to a hotel, but he took several runs up into the town to have a look at it.

He also laid in a supply of such things as he deemed he would need on the down trip, and when Gordon Grayhurst and Valentine Gibson came on board the fat boy was serene and self-satisfied.

They greeted him like an old acquaintance, and noted that he was the only passenger going back on the steamer that had come up the river on her, all the rest being strangers.

The run down was another series of jokes on the part of the serious-faced fat boy, and from the clerk to the bootblack all had to suffer in some way or other.

When the steamer arrived at Vicksburg it was at night and after eleven o'clock.

But the fat boy was up, as were also the two friends, and all who came on board were critically examined as they did so by the three.

During the run down there had been card-playing, but no games for big money, and Gordon Grayhurst and Valentine Gibson had played, but with nothing staked upon the games.

The fat boy had watched them with such interest that he was invited by Valentine Gibson to play a game with him.

"I'm your honey," said the fat boy, and he won five straight games, to the surprise of Gibson and amusement of Gordon Grayhurst.

"Where did you learn to play cards, sonny?" asked Gibson.

"At Sunday-school picnics," was the reply, and the fat boy went then to watch a game at another table.

There were two men there who had come aboard at Vicksburg.

They had at first been very wary, but seeing that all except two were strangers to them, they sat down and began to play with two men from up the country, who had plenty of money and bet high.

These two men were none other than Blackleg Bill and Buck Staples.

They had been told by the captain that he would take them back to New Orleans, but never again should they travel on his boat, and

if they created any disturbance he would put them in irons.

They were very humble for awhile, then caught sight of the up-countrymen, and got them into a game with them.

The countrymen were good players, and won steadily for awhile.

But, just as the fat boy took a seat to watch the game they began to lose.

Gordon Grayhurst and Valentine Gibson sat apart, also watching the game, though not appearing to do so.

The fat boy somehow disconcerted both Blackleg Bill and Buck Staples, by "chipping in" his advice, and watching them so intently, until at last the former said, as he lost a game which he had seemed sure a moment before of winning:

"See here, Fatty, you just keep your mouth shut and stop watchin' of me."

"A cat can look at a king, I guess, and I'll ask the captain if I can't sit here and watch the game."

This silenced the two gamblers; but so attentive was the fat boy to their every act, that they could not play with their accustomed skill, and the games went against them again.

When they had lost about five hundred, Blackleg Bill said:

"Well, mates, that takes my pile, so I quits."

"Me, too," was Buck Staples's remark, and the two arose from the table.

"Want to play with me?" innocently asked the fat boy.

"Naw, I never play with kids," and the two men took a drink at the bar, lighted their cigars and went out upon the guards.

They were promptly followed by the fat boy.

"Grayhurst, did you notice how that fat boy watched those gamblers?"

"Yes, and disconcerted them, it seemed to me."

"It is so, and he asked them to play with him."

"So I heard."

"Now he has boldly followed them out of the cabin."

"I saw that he did, and I only hope he will not get into any trouble with them, for they are in an ugly humor, after their affair going up the river, and just now having lost five hundred dollars."

"Suppose we go out and see if he is cutting up any of his pranks with them?"

"With pleasure, for I would not see the boy hurt if I could prevent it."

So the two friends walked out upon the guards, and failing to find the two gamblers and the fat boy there, went on deck.

"There they are," and Valentine Gibson pointed to the three forward, just where had been Diamond Jack's favorite place.

"Yes, and the fat boy is with them."

"He is, and they appear to be getting along without any trouble now, but the boy must be cautious."

"Let us call him and give him warning."

This they did, but in answer came the words:

"Will see you later, gents; I'm playing a little game just now and have got all the trumps."

With this the two friends returned to the cabin, Gibson remarking:

"That boy is a mystery to me."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE "LITTLE GAME" THAT WAS PLAYED.

WHEN the two gamblers left the Social Hall of the Eclipse, they went upon deck and took seats.

"I say, Buck, things is getting very black against us."

"Sure."

"We were playing a too high hand of late, and it's got folks on to us."

"That's so."

"Our pard is dead, and I don't understand what they tell us that the cap'n was run ashore at Vicksburg by a preacher."

"Tain't reasonable, for he hain't the running kind."

"But they do say that country boy won his gold box, diamond dice and also his star, and that took his good luck."

"Then a preacher comes along and drives him ashore at Vicksburg."

"Yes."

"And the captain says we don't travel no more on his boat."

"He did say so, sure."

"Then what is we to do?"

"The Lord only knows."

"We lost five thousand to-night."

"Yas, but it were the counterfeit money I paid 'em in."

"Good! I was afeerd it was good money."

"I hain't no fool to give up good money."

"That's right."

"Does yer know why we lost to-night?"

"I seen it."

"The fat boy."

"Yas."

"He queered us."

"Sure."

"He's a hoodoo, for I couldn't play a false card while he was watching me."

"Neither could I."

"Then he's got cheek ter ask us ter play."

"Sure, ther cheek of a Gover'ment mule—Lordy! there he comes now."

Just then the fat boy appeared.

He advanced with a free and easy step, the moonlight revealing his stout form plainly.

"Gents, I want to break a hundred dollars, to get some change to buy candy to suck, and they can't break it in the bar, and the clerk told me he wouldn't do it, for I was too big to be a baby and eat candy."

"Now, I saw that you had some change, so please break the bill for me."

"Is it good money?"

"If it isn't I don't know it, but I got it from the bank, in Memphis."

Buck, you break it for him," and the tone of Blackleg Bill was significant.

"Yas, I'll do it," and Buck Staples took out his roll of counterfeit money.

"That's good money is it?" innocently asked the fat boy.

"What does yer take us for?"

"I'll tell you," and the fat boy took a seat just behind the two men, and a revolver in each hand pressed hard against their backs.

"I take you for just what you are, gambling Blacklegs, passers of counterfeit money and thieves and murderers in general— Hold on! for I've got a cocked revolver pressed against your backs, just under the left shoulder-blades, and a move will send the bullets through your hearts."

"Say, sonny, is you joking?" asked Blackleg Bill with a sickly smile.

"Pass your hands behind you, Blackleg Bill."

"Quick!"

With an oath the gambler obeyed, and how he did it the villain did not know, but in an instant steel manacles were clasped upon his wrists, and then came the stern command:

"Now, Staples, put your hands behind you!"

"I'll see you—"

"Obey, or die!" cried the fat boy and the second gambler was manacled in an instant.

A groan came from the lips of Staples, as he felt himself captured thus, while Blackleg Bill said in a husky voice:

"Who in thunder is yer?"

"Charlie Chumley, the fat boy," and the speaker laughed lightly.

"What does yer want with us?"

"Well, Blackleg Bill, you are wanted for several murders you have committed on the river."

"It's a lie!"

"It is the truth, for I have the data on you."

"And you, Staples, I want as a card sharp and cheat, a passer of counterfeit money, for I have not the crime to set against you of murder."

Just then Gordon Grayhurst and Valentine Gibson came on deck, and the reader recalls the remark of the fat boy to their calling him away, fearing he would get into trouble, that:

"He was playing a little game and held a hand full of trumps."

When the two friends had departed, the fat boy held a long conversation with his two prisoners.

"I don't wish to take you below while any one is stirring, but I am going to see that you occupy pleasant quartors for the night in a state-room."

When midnight had passed, the boy put a chain through the manacles of his prisoners, and said:

"Now go; and when we reach the guards, I will lead the way; but if I go first here, I very much fear I might get a fall—see?"

The two men did see, and muttered curses against him, for they had made up their minds to kick him overboard when he neared the edge of the deck to descend.

But they went first, and soon after were led into a state-room.

Here Blackleg Bill was chained securely, as Jack Dimond had been, and then the youth said:

"Any attempt to escape you will find useless, and, in fact, fatal, for I have some one to watch you, Blackleg Bill."

"Now, Staples, I'll take you to your quarters."

He locked the doors, entering into the cabin and out upon the guard, and took both keys.

Staples followed like one who was beyond making resistance.

Entering his own state-room, the fat boy said:

"Now see here, Staples, if you are a murderer, I don't know it, but I do know that you are a card cheat and counterfeiter."

"These crimes I can promise you pardon for, if you care to save yourself by telling me what I wish to know."

"If you refuse, then I shall hunt up your record and perhaps hang you after all."

"What do you say?"

CHAPTER XXII.

BRUGHT TO TERMS.

THE man Staples seemed to have fallen wholly under the influence of the fat boy.

He sat in silence and heard what he had to say, and then said:

"What do you want me to do?"

"I am aware that there are a number of steamboat-thieves upon the Mississippi River, and they are known as Blackleg gamblers.

"A number of gamblers are square, good fellows, who trust to chance wholly, and their nerve and skill enable them to win big money.

"But there are those who play with marked cards, who play into each others' hands, who pay their losses in counterfeit money, and who have been banded together to rob innocent players.

"This band is under the lead of Jack Dimond, alias Diamond Jack, and Blackleg Bill is his lieutenant."

"I have evidence to hang Jack Dimond and Blackleg Bill and to send you to prison for a long term."

"But there are more of your band whom I want, and I wish your aid."

"To betray them?"

"That is just it."

"They would kill me."

"They will do no such thing."

"I know 'em."

"I know that they will be all either hanged or imprisoned, so how can they harm you?"

"They may escape."

"There is no fear of that, but you must take the chances on that score."

"I know our laws, and it would be death to me."

"Your captain, Jack Dimond, Blackleg Bill, yourself, and the man who was killed going up the river by Mr. Gibson, are four, so how many more make up the band?"

"Six, now that our mate was killed."

"Well, I can account for four, so where are the other two?"

"I don't know."

"Well, as you do not seem to care to accept my offer, I will find them out, and make terms with one of them."

"In fact, I will even offer Blackleg Bill his pardon but what I bag the whole band."

"Where is the captain?"

"A prisoner."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"I can't believe it."

"I can show him to you."

"Seeing is believing."

The fat boy arose and taking Buck Staples with him led him to state-room number fifteen.

He opened the door on the guard and said:

"Well, Dimond, I have gotten your friends Staples and Blackleg Bill."

"The deuce you have!" came in the voice of Jack Dimond, but Buck Staples recognized it and by the dim light saw a man chained to the bed.

"You is right," he said, and he was glad to get out.

Then he was led back to another state-room.

"This is where you are to stay, Staples, and I will have to chain you as I did the others."

"I can't help it."

"You are convinced?"

"I saw him."

"It was your captain?"

"Yes."

"And now?"

"What?"

"What will you do?"

"I've got some sense."

"That means that you will squeal?"

"I'll do it if it's not known to come from me."

"No, I'll see to that."

"Has you the power to keep your promise?"

"Yes, I'll act on the square with you."

"All right."

"You come to my terms?"

"I wants the cash my mates has about 'em, for if they is going to be hanged and go to prison they won't want money."

"You will get your freedom alone, for you already have money."

"How does you know?"

"I saw it."

"It's counterfeit."

"Give me your counterfeit money."

The man asked to be set free to get it, but the fat boy searched him and found two rolls of money, also a bunch of skeleton keys, a revolver and a knife.

"This roll of money is counterfeit, and this is good."

"You have some hundreds of dollars here of good bills, so that is all you will get."

"Taen I won't talk."

"All right; I know who will."

"Hold on!"

"Well?"

"I'll squeal."

"And I'll listen."

"Where shall I begin?"

"Answer my questions."

"All right, fat."

"Jack Dimond is your captain?"

"Sure."

"Blackleg Bill your lieutenant."

"Right."

"There were seven members in the band."

"There were nine."

"Where are the others?"

"Went same way our pard went t'other night."

"I see."

"And you are bound by laws?"

"Wu'st kind."

"You have to give up a certain per cent. to the chief?"

"Yes, and he finds our pigeons to pluck, and is pledged to help us out if we get into trouble, or prison."

"Now, who are the other two?"

"One is named Sam Sykes, and t'other is his wife."

"Ahl a woman in the band?"

"She's useful."

"Doubtless! but what are her duties?"

"Well, she and Sam travels to do the light-fingered work."

"Rob state-rooms, pick pockets and such?"

"Just that."

"Where are they?"

The man was silent.

"Do you know I saw an old couple come on the boat on the way up, and the same two got on again at Vicksburg to-night."

"Are those the two?"

"You is onto them, pal."

"All right, you need say no more."

"Now, good-night, and remember I am watching you."

With this the prisoner was locked to his bed, and the fat boy left him, going to his own state-room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FAIR PASSENGER.

THE morning came and Gordon Grayhurst and Valentine Gibson met at breakfast.

The fat boy was not in his accustomed place, and the waiter said that he had not yet appeared.

The two friends glanced at each other significantly.

They glanced up the table at the line of faces, but nowhere were visible the evil countenances of the two gamblers.

This looked suspicious the friends thought.

After finishing their breakfast they strolled to the office.

"Mr. Butler, where is our amusing fat boy this morning?" asked Gordon Grayhurst.

"He went ashore at Grand Gulf, sir."

"Indeed! he did not speak of leaving us so soon."

The clerk laughed and responded:

"He was a queer one, Mr. Grayhurst."

There they found the fair passenger, enjoying the view from that exalted position.

They removed their hats and stood talking with the pilot, though they managed to discover that the lady was young, exceedingly pretty, with red golden hair, black eyes and the whitest of teeth.

Her figure was slender and graceful, she was well dressed and a lady.

She now and then addressed the pilot, in a low voice, soft and pleasant, and seemed greatly interested with the approaching view of the Cliff City, Natchez.

The pilot asked her if she cared to blow the whistle for Natchez and she accepted gracefully, rising and placing her foot upon the lever.

"Blow two long, two short and one long whistle, miss," said the obliging pilot.

She did as he directed and the deep boom of the massive whistle rung out far over the lowlands of Louisiana upon the right, and were sent back by the cliffs of Mississippi upon the left in a thousand echoes.

Both Grayhurst and Gibson had noticed a handsome boot and well turned foot as she put it upon the lever, and that her hands were gloved, small and shapely.

The landing at Natchez was made and the pilot told them that they would be there a couple of hours or more.

Then Mr. Gibson turned and said:

"Pardon me, but my friend, Mr. Grayhurst, and myself are going for a drive over this very pretty town, and if you and any companion you would like to ask, will accompany us, we shall feel honored."

The lady bowed and said:

"Thank you, but I am traveling alone."

"Still if you will allow me to accompany you I will go with pleasure."

"I can vouch for these gentlemen, miss, for this is Mr. Gordon Grayhurst a planter on the lower river, and this one is Mr. Gibson, a gentleman living in New Orleans."

"I don't know your name, though, miss, to finish the introduction," said the pilot.

"I am Miss Cassell," was the smiling reply, and the two gentlemen escorted her ashore, a carriage was called and a drive taken up the long hill to The Bluff, and thence over the handsome city of Natchez, the ride extending into the country among the grand old homes for which the place is noted.

The return to the boat was just in time, and thanking the two escorts, Miss Cassell went to the ladies' cabin, and soon after gave them a bow from her place at the dinner table.

When evening came some one asked for music, and Miss Cassell kindly obliged them, playing the piano with a sympathetic and skillful touch, and playing music which true lovers of music could understand, instead of the ding-dong, crash *tremendissimo* classical music which the wild-haired German artists with unpronounceable names affect, and the ultra-fashionable society pretend to enjoy and understand.

Her playing brought a number of hearers from the forward cabin, and among them Grayhurst and Gibson.

When she completed her playing she went over and took a seat between an old man and his wife who had particularly enjoyed hearing her.

The old gentleman had long gray hair, and wore a silk skull-cap, as though afraid of catching cold.

He was dressed in an old-style blue cut-away coat, with brass buttons, wore buckles upon his shoes, and had on a ruffled shirt with an old-fashioned diamond pin in his cravat.

The old lady was prim, well preserved, kept her hands constantly busy with fancy-work, and yet allowed nothing to escape her that was going on.

They seemed complimented at the coming of Miss Cassell to sit by them, and the old lady at once fell in love with the handsome jewels worn by the young woman.

"I believe your state-room adjoins mine, and has a communicating door.

"I am so glad, for I feel really timid as I have considerable money with me, and, as you see, quite a number of jewels, so have dreaded being robbed."

"We will leave the door ajar, my dear, so have no fear," said the old gentleman, and Miss Cassell looked pleased and said:

"Then I am no longer in dread."

CHAPTER XXIV. MIDNIGHT VISITORS.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Miss Cassell retired to her state-room.

The old couple had already retired, but the

lady knocked at the door to say that she might open the door when she went to bed and leave it ajar.

Miss Cassell thanked her kindly, and soon after did as she was directed.

The lights were turned low in the steamer, all was quiet on board, save the rattle of the paddle-wheel and booming of the escape-pipes, with the occasional jingling of a bell from the pilot-house.

Just at midnight the door of Miss Cassell's room opened softly.

The old lady appeared, and went noiselessly to the sleepers' bed.

She held something in her hand which she laid softly over the face of Miss Cassell.

Then she stepped back into her own room.

Soon after, she came with another of the same kind, and put this one on the sleeper's face.

Then she stepped to the door and called her husband.

He entered, and then the trunk of Miss Cassell was opened and a number of things taken out, the two talking in whispers the while.

Then the old man stepped to the glass door opening upon the guard.

He opened it, and after a time short working there, had removed a piece of glass from the door.

The hole thus made was large enough to admit an arm, so that the door could be unlocked.

Then a small bottle marked "chloroform" was dropped upon the floor along with a sponge.

The things taken from the trunk of Miss Cassell were then placed in a secret receptacle in the bustle worn by the old lady.

"Now, we are all right," whispered the man.

"Yes, plenty of money, jewels and other things."

"We must be hard to rouse, too, for of course we were robbed as well," and the tray of their trunk was left out, and their valuables placed in the accommodating bustle of the old lady.

Having secured their treasure, they dropped off serenely to sleep, as though with the consciousness of having done a good action.

When the deep breathing of the man and the steady, strong breathing of the woman showed that the two slumbered serenely, Miss Cassell awoke.

She did not awake like one who had been under the influence of a drug, for she was wide awake in an instant.

She arose softly, and opening the door, which was ajar, stepped toward the two sleepers.

Then she tied about her face a handkerchief, covering mouth and nostrils, and began to spray the two sleepers with chloroform.

She soon felt that she had done her work sufficiently well, for she opened the door and stepped back into the pure air of her own room.

Then she proceeded to dress, and having completed her toilet, stepped back into the state-room of the sleepers.

Their slumber was so profound that they did not feel her take their hands and slip upon the wrists of each a pair of manacles, which were then attached to the bed by a chain, the latter being also locked.

Then the door was opened to admit fresh air, and Miss Cassell threw herself upon her bed to get some more rest.

She was at last awakened by low voices, and rising, found that dawn had come, and the rising sun was tinting the glass windows of the outer door.

She at once entered the next state room, and said pleasantly:

"Good-morning!"

"We have been chloroformed and robbed," said the man, in a husky voice.

"Yes, our money, jewels, all gone," wailed the woman.

"Don't fret about those things, my dear friends, for I can tell you where they are."

"You?"

"Yes."

"How do you know, and why did they not iron you?"

"Who?"

"The robbers."

"What robbers?"

"Those who took our jewels."

"And our money."

"They robbed me, too."

"They did?"

"Oh, yes, but let me show you how I can make them give up their booty."

"First set us free, for see, we are ironed."

"That is all right."

"All right to be ironed?"

"Oh, yes, for I have got the robbers."

"You?"

"Yes, you."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that last night I had a dream."

"A dream, yes."

"A woman came into my room and placed a handkerchief saturated with chloroform upon my face."

"Oh!"

"I removed it at once, folded it in the bedding, and replaced it with one of my own."

"The woman came back and tried the same game with another handkerchief, and again I thwarted her."

"Believing me under the influence of the drug, she and her husband robbed me."

"See, here is money, here my jewels, all in your bustle."

"Is it not strange?"

The man groaned and the woman whimpered.

"So I played the chloroform act, got them under its influence, put them in irons and spoiled their little game."

"It was a clever one, I admit, for they cut a piece of glass out of my door, with a diamond-cutter, to make believe the robber had entered that way."

"Now I'll just take my money and valuables, also your cash and jewelry, even to the counterfeit money you have with you, Sam Sykes and wife."

"Who are you?" gasped the man.

"Miss Cassell, the Lady Detective," was the smiling answer.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN BANDS OF STEEL.

THAT that they were cleverly and fairly caught the two robbers felt certain.

They knew not the why or wherefore, but there they were in irons, chained to the bed.

The daylight revealed the fact, too, that Sam Sykes wore a white wig, was made up as an old man, as his wife was as an old woman.

They had long played a bold game, robbing fellow-travelers, and passing counterfeit money whenever they could do so with safety.

Calling the stewardess, Miss Cassell sent a note to the captain, and then she said:

"Now you can get up and dress yourselves, as well as you can, and then remain in your state-room.

"Keep your outer door locked and simply say that you are not feeling well so will remain in bed."

"I have written to have your breakfast sent to my room, so you shall not suffer."

"We will reach New Orleans this afternoon, and then I will find you safer quarters, though not near so pleasant."

"See here, woman, who are you?" asked Sam Sykes.

"Miss Cassell the Detective, I told you."

"What is your charge against us?"

"Robbery and passing counterfeit money."

"You have no proof."

"What am I here for, why are you disguised, and what is the meaning of all this counterfeit money found in your possession?"

The man groaned, the woman looked defiant.

"You love money, do you not?" said the woman.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Sykes."

"Who told you my name was Sykes?"

"Do you deny it?"

"Yes."

"It is useless."

"Well, you love money do you not?"

"Not as much as you do, to rob and cheat for it."

"Well, we can pay you big money to hush this up."

"There's a very snug sum in a reward offered for the perpetrators of certain robberies you have been guilty of."

"Who says so?"

"I do, for I know you both well, now, and let me tell you that I know you to be members of Diamond Jack's band of River Rats."

"We are not."

"Oh yes you are."

"You cannot prove it."

"You will see when I bring you face to face with Diamond Jack, Blackleg Bill and Buck Staples."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that those I named one prisoners on board this steamer."

"Whose prisoners?"

"Well, I have assistants, one known as Davy Dunn, another as Parson Ariel Shepherd, a third as Charlie Chumley a fat boy."

"And you have them with you on this steamer?"

"All, yes, all are here."

"And Diamond Jack and the others?"

"Yes."
 "Suppose we turn state's evidence, do we go free?"
 "No, for I do not care for any information I cannot get unaided."
 "Then that settles us."
 "It does."
 "You won't take big money or a bribe?"
 "I might be tempted, but then there is Davy Dunn."
 "We'll pay him big money too."
 "Then there is the fat boy."
 "We'll give him the same as the others."
 "You forget the parson."
 "He'll sell out cheap."
 "On the contrary he will not sell at all."
 "Try him."
 "I know that he will not."
 "Can't you help us to escape without the others?"
 "I could, yes."
 "And you will?"
 "No."

"But here is your breakfast," and the detective went to her state-room door, closing the one between after her.

"Set it there," she said to the waiter, and soon after she spread it before her prisoners.

Then she went out to get her own breakfast and bowed most graciously to Gordon Grayhurst and his friend Gibson.

They sought her after breakfast and asked her to join them upon deck in a promenade, but she declined as she said the two old people whom they had doubtless noted were confined to their state-room, and she wished to be with them as much as possible.

Then she dismissed them with renewed thanks for her drive, and good-by.

They saw that she did not care to continue the acquaintance ashore, begun on the steamboat, so bowed and retired.

Early in the afternoon the Crescent City came in sight, and Miss Cassell, when the steamboat landed, went ashore and entering a carriage was driven rapidly away.

The passengers departed from the steamer in twos and alone, and soon all had gone, Valentine Gibson accepting the invitation of the young planter to go at once to The Ferns with him.

But there were fine state-rooms upon the steamboat, which as many waiters were told to guard until relieved.

This they did for an hour perhaps, when a police officer came on board the steamboat.

The waiters were relieved from duty and the officer took charge.

When nightfall came the chief of police appeared, accompanied by Miss Cassell.

She led the way first to the state-room occupied by Diamond Jack.

The prisoner was there, sullen and pale.

He was relieved of his irons, handcuffed to a police officer and sent ashore to enter a carriage and drive away.

Blackleg Bill went next in the same way, then Sam Sykes and his wife, after which Buck Staples, not in irons, left with the chief of police and Miss Cassell, and were driven rapidly to Headquarters, while the baggage of all followed in a van.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FERRET OF THE MISSISSIPPI.

WHEN Miss Cassell, the Lady Detective, left the steamer she was set down at Police Headquarters.

The chief soon after admitted her to a private interview with him.

He arose politely, while without raising her veil she said:

"Miss Cassell, sir."

"And how can I serve Miss Cassell?" he asked politely.

"By listening to a long story I have to tell you."

The chief of police looked at his watch and said:

"I can give you just ten minutes, Miss Cassell."

"I'll need an hour," and the veil was raised, while a laugh broke from the lips of the visitor.

"See here, Dick Doom, when are you going to stop fooling me?"

The chief was not angry in the least.

"Oh, chief, I like to see how well I can play the girl, you know, and if I fool you then I have no dread of any one else."

"I half believe you are a girl, you play your part so well."

"I play a man's part just as well, I think."

"Yes, I believe you do."

"But when did you get in?"
 "On the Eclipse twenty minutes ago; but as you have only ten minutes to give me why I'll call again."
 "You'll do nothing of the kind, for as Miss Cassell I expected you were to pour into my callous ears a tale of woe."
 "I have a long story to tell you."
 "Fire away."
 "How is your wife?"
 "Never better, and asking every day if I have seen you."
 "Thanks."
 "But now to work."
 "Well?"
 "Do you know a man in town by the name of Valentine Gibson?"
 "Yes, a rich young sport."
 "Anything against him?"
 "On the contrary, a very nice fellow, I have heard."
 "He has nerve?"
 "Yes."
 "I think, though, I can place him in some acts of long ago that may give him trouble; but I don't know, am not sure, and they can wait."
 "Have you seen him?"
 "Yes."
 "Where?"
 "On the Eclipse, for he went up the river with me."
 "He often takes trips."
 "Many on board?"
 "Yes, quite a number."
 "You went as Miss Cassell?"
 "No."
 "I don't believe you; and guess Gibson fell in love with you."
 "He was very kind, when I was Miss Cassell, and not unkind when I was somebody else."
 "You have been masquerading again, eh?"
 "Oh, yes; I started as Davy Dunn, a young gent from the Mississippi Hills, on my first visit to the city."
 "I'll bet you looked green."
 "As the Emerald Isle, chief."
 "And what did you discover?"
 "Young Planter Grayhurst was on board."
 "He knew you?"
 "Not he."
 "Did he gamble, for his father was once a heavy player?"
 "He did get into a game with two gamblers."
 "Who were they?"
 "Two of Diamond Jack's gang."
 "Ah! you are getting interesting."
 "I caught them cheating him, as he also did, after they had won five thousand from him, and when he accused them, though he was unarmed, one attempted to kill him."
 "I knocked up the weapon, the other drew, and Mr. Gibson saved Gordon Grayhurst's life by killing the gambler."
 "Good! one out of the way, though it was a pity he was not hanged."
 "The others had to retire with their dead comrade, and I followed."
 "I overheard their talk, joined them, and—well, there is no need of telling all about it, I forced them to give up the five thousand they won from Mr. Grayhurst."
 "Good for you, Dick Doom."
 "They went ashore with their dead companion, and I returned to the cabin."
 "Diamond Jack had played with Mr. Gibson, and won his money, and challenged Mr. Grayhurst.
 "I chipped in and said I would play."
 "We threw dice to see who should play the gambler, he furnishing us his gold box and diamond-studded dice."
 "I have heard of them."
 "Here they are."
 "Ah! how did you get them?"
 "Won them."
 "They are simply superb."
 "I won with three sixes the three throws, and then played the gambler for this box and dice."
 "And won them, too?"
 "Oh, yes."
 "I did not know that you gambled?"
 "I do when I find need to, and candidly I have phenomenal luck, chief."
 "I do not doubt it."
 "I gave Mr. Grayhurst his money, and I saw it worried Diamond Jack when I told him I was a missionary and talked Blackleg Bill into giving it up."
 "I won Diamond Jack's charm, also, and considerable money."
 "Is not this pretty?"
 He handed over the diamond star as he spoke, and the chief was greatly delighted with it.

"Now let me show you how I can throw sixes every time."
 "Do so."
 "Do you see the ace?"
 "Yes."
 "I push it with the end of a pencil and it touches a spring inside."
 "That spring brings a weight from the center down to the ace, and you see it comes sixes nine times in ten."
 "I can manipulate it with my finger-nail, as Diamond Jack did, so no one suspected him."
 "You did?"
 "Oh, I am naturally suspicious."
 "And beat him at his own game."
 "Why not, when armed for it," was the cool query.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FERRET CONTINUES HIS STORY.

"AND then, Dick?" said the chief.

"Well, sir, I went on deck and had a talk with Diamond Jack, and then sought my state-room.

"I was called out some time after by what I believed a waiter, who whispered that he believed the boat was on fire.

"It was Diamond Jack."

"I see."

"He dealt me a blow with a billy, which would have crushed my skull, but for the wire frame in my hat."

"The villain."

"As it was he knocked me down, stunned, searched my pockets and threw me overboard."

"What?"

"The water revived me, I swam ashore, and as the steamer had a bend to round I got a man to drive me across, slipped on board when the Eclipse landed and gained my state-room."

"Dick Doom you amaze me more and more."

"Of course the gambler did not get my money or anything else, and when I came out the next morning it was as Parson Ariel Shepherd."

"Carrying out your destiny of a born detective."

"Yes, sir, and as Parson Shepherd I discovered that many suspected Diamond Jack of having murdered me."

"I made myself generally obnoxious, which I enjoyed."

"Oh yes, the fun in you will crop out, Dick."

"When night came I had the boldness to denounce gambling, and say that it should not be done in my presence."

"Good!"

"I saw that Diamond Jack intended to play with Mr. Grayhurst, and I was determined to prevent that."

"Just like you, Dick."

"Well, sir, I drove Diamond Jack out of Social Hall, followed him on deck, and made him my prisoner."

"You dared do that?"

"Why not, sir?"

"He is a very desperate man."

"I had the drop on him, sir, so I clapped the steels on his wrists and took him to a state-room next to mine."

"Of course the captain knew your game?"

"Yes, sir, Captain C—— and the clerk were both in my secret, as I had to have it so."

"Of course."

"I told Diamond Jack that I was Davy Dunn, whom he had tried to murder, and then I ironed him to his bed and left him."

"The next morning the gambler and the parson were missing, and that created talk."

"But a fat boy, Charlie Chumley, came on board, and you should have seen him."

"Who was he?"

"Well, sir, he had his fun with the waiters, the passengers, a parrot, a monkey, an old maid, an organ-grinder from Rome, and everybody else who came his way."

"I wish you to see that fat boy some time, sir, for I will put the rig on for you."

"The rig?"

"Yes, sir."

"You?"

"Yes, sir. I have a suit of india-rubber which blows up well, and with a wig on, plumpers in my cheeks, a wide collar and odd dress. I make the nicest fat boy in the world."

"A countryman first?"

"Yes, sir, a youth with goggles and sandy hair."

"Then a parson?"

"With spectacles, a gray wig, a change of expression, and an ecclesiastical-cut suit of clothes, sir."

"Next a fat boy?"

"That was my strong point, sir, and I had more fun than a basket of puppies."

The chief laughed in spite of the seriousness of the situation.

"Yes, I'll warrant you got all of the fun out of it you could, Dick Doom, for, somehow, you can find amusement at a funeral."

"I look on both sides of life, sir."

"But you should have seen me as Chumley, the fat boy, for I did enjoy it, and Mr. Grayhurst and Mr. Gibson fairly shadowed me to see the fun."

"And saw it?"

"Oh, yes, sir; for with a parrot, Italian, monkey, old maid and some colored folks, I certainly had the material for a circus."

"How many disguises have you got?"

"Some twenty, sir."

"And all perfect?"

"As they can be, sir."

"All this time you had a prisoner in your state-room?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then?"

"I went on up to Memphis, and Mr. Grayhurst and Mr. Gibson came back on the boat as I did."

"I still remained as the fat boy, and as I had hoped, I caught my men."

"Who?"

"Blackleg Bill and Buck Staples."

"They boarded the boat again, then?"

"Yes, sir, at Vicksburg, and they had the cheek to get two up-river men into a game with them."

"And cheated them?"

"They were beginning to do so, when I took a look over them and somehow they got rattled and couldn't cheat."

"You were the fat boy then?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then?"

"They lost some money and then paid it in counterfeit bills."

"Ah!"

"I followed out of the cabin, got my revolver muzzles against their backs, so managed to walk them off to a state-room, when I ironed them."

"Then I led Buck Staples to another state-room, offered him his freedom, as I had no murder charge against him, and so got the whole story from him."

"I also learned how two of the band, Sam Sykes and his wife were playing their game of robbing passengers, so I then let the fat boy go ashore, was metamorphosed into a lady detective, after allowing them to rob me, arrested them both, so that I have the whole band now in irons on board the Eclipse, and wish you to drive down with me to the levee, so we can fetch them to jail."

"Dick Doom, you are the veriest ferret I ever saw, and you have done what we never could accomplish before, break up the Blackleg band upon the Mississippi River," said the chief earnestly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FERRET ON ANOTHER TRAIL.

WHEN Dick Doom felt that he had secured the "River Rats" as Diamond Jack and his band were called, he set Buck Staples free, as he promised, with the admonition never to be seen in that part of the country again.

Then, as Dick Doom he took a run upon the various steamboat lines leaving New Orleans, and managed to pick up several more characters who made their prey upon travelers.

These were brought to New Orleans and turned over to the chief, after which the young detective went off on an expedition for his own amusement or interest.

He had intended going up to The Ferns Plantation for a visit, but learned that Gordon Grayhurst was away, and Marion had returned to boarding-school.

It was the Christmas holidays before he again returned to the city, on the call of the chief of police, who had several rewards to pay over to him, and also a certain matter to consult him on.

"You are really getting quite a fortune saved up, Dick, and will be a rich man if you keep on winning rewards as you have been doing," said the chief.

"Yes, chief, but to me it all seems like blood-money."

"Yet still all money goes at one time or another, for evil purposes, and I shall hold on to what I have, at least until it aids me to secure more."

"Well, that is right, for you have well earned

it, and no man has ever risked more for gold, or worked harder, though I do you the justice to say that you never worked for the reward, but for the capture of the criminal."

"That has been my motive, sir."

"But you said that you had a matter to talk over with me?"

"Yes, Dick."

"In the detective line, sir?"

"Well, you shall see."

"Your manner implies, chief, that it is serious."

"Have you heard lately from your friends, the Grayhursts?"

"Not since I left, sir."

"I hope there is nothing wrong there?"

"Well, Dick, I fear that there is."

"Please explain, sir."

"How old is Miss Grayhurst?"

"About sixteen, sir."

"Well, she is married."

"Married?"

"Yes, Dick."

"Marion Grayhurst married?"

"I feared it would hit you hard, Dick."

"No, no, sir, not as you think, for I was not in love with Marion, except that I regarded her as a sister."

"I am very glad to hear that."

"But this is so sudden."

"It was to me, for I regarded her as a mere child."

"When was she married, sir?"

"Two months since."

"You know whom she married, sir?"

"Yes."

"Was it Gibson?"

"That is the man."

"Valentine Gibson?"

"Yes."

"He met her brother on the Eclipse just six months ago."

"Yes, you told me of their meeting, and that he saved Grayhurst's life."

"Yes, and traded on that to win the sister."

"I suppose so, while I believe he got young Grayhurst into a corner."

"How so, sir?"

"I think, though I may be wrong, that he won his money at a gaming-table, and sold his notes back to him for his sister's hand, for she was infatuated with Gibson, I have heard, and the brother alone stood in the way."

"Chief?"

"Yes, Dick."

"I made a mistake not to sift the past record of that man before I went away."

"You think it was bad?"

"I do."

"What reason have you?"

"Well, sir, I will tell you."

"He stands well here."

"That may be, sir, but hear my story."

"All right, Dick."

"I overheard a conversation on the river once, between two young doctors."

"They were going to seek homes to settle on, got acquainted, and become friendly."

"A bond of sympathy they had between them, Dick."

"Yes, sir."

"One was telling the other how he saw a man on the deck below who reminded him of a person who called upon him in the city where he was studying medicine, and told him his name was Valentine, that he was a doctor, and had just lost a most remarkable case."

"It was a wealthy planter, and as the family would not submit to a post-mortem, he wished to know what was the matter with the man, and said he would pay all expenses for the recovering of his body."

"This he did, and the students discovered that the man was in good health, and had died by poison."

"The doctor, Parsons was his name, never had another call from Doctor Valentine, and so decided that the old planter had been put out of the way purposely."

"He said the planter's name was Gibson."

"Ah!"

"I wrote all down, as soon as I went to my state-room, but I did not see the man he pointed out to his friend, and whom he vowed was the Doctor Valentine who came to see him."

"He went up to him to renew the acquaintance, but was told that he was mistaken."

"That looks suspicious."

"Yes, sir, and Doctor Parsons furthermore said that he had the skeleton of the old planter and intended putting it into his office."

"He has settled here, for I have seen him often, and I shall go and ask him just where that planter lived."

"Then I shall go there and see if Valentine Gibson is known in those parts."

"Yes, I will go at once, sir."

CHAPTER XXIX.

TRACKED.

TWO weeks after the conversation just related between the New Orleans chief of police and Dick Doom, the latter came again into the office.

"Back once more, Dick."

"I am glad to see you."

"Thank you, sir," and Dick Doom dropped into a chair in a tired way.

"Well, Dick, what news?"

"I saw Doctor Parsons, sir."

"Yes."

"I told him that I knew, no matter how, of his having been given the body of the planter to dissect, and asked him simply to give me the locality."

"Which he did?"

"He seemed to regret exceedingly the affair,

for he had no idea that he was playing into the hands of a designing man, and told me just how it was.

"I went up the river to the place nearest where the planter lived, drove to his home and found strangers there."

"The home had been sold out by the heir."

"Heir?"

"Yes, sir, a son, and he had gotten cash for everything and gone away, no one knew where."

"What was this heir's record?"

"Very bad, sir, and it was said that his father had intended making another will, and disinherit him, when he was suddenly taken ill and died."

"A few hinted at his being poisoned, and at last there were a few who decided to dig up the body and investigate."

"But that very night the grave was opened and it was said that the medical students took the body."

"Ah, I see."

"Public opinion was, however, so bitter, sir, against the son, that, as I stated, he left, converting all his belongings into cash."

"And the name of this heir?"

"Is Valentine Gibson."

The chief whistled.

"He knocked about the world and at last came here."

"You are sure it is the same man?"

"You know Mr. Gibson, sir?"

"Oh, yes."

"Here is a photograph of the Valentine Gibson who was the heir of the old planter."

"This photograph, Dick, was taken some years ago, but it is the same man."

"So I felt sure, sir."

"Another thing, Dick."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you seen the papers lately?"

"No, sir, not one."

"You know nothing of what has happened to Mr. Grayhurst?"

"My God! what has happened now, sir?"

"Mr. Gordon Grayhurst is dead."

"Dead! Gordon dead?"

"Yes, I am sorry to tell you."

"Poor Gordon."

"It is sad, Dick, but worst of all he was killed in a duel."

"Killed in a duel?" and Dick Doom's lips quivered.

"Yes, he was killed ten days ago."

"Who killed him?"

"A fast young fellow by the name of Clyde Carlyle."

"Clyde Carlyle?"

"Yes, a man about town of late, but who is a stranger here."

"I never heard of him, sir."

"He was a great friend of Valentine Gibson."

"A friend of Valentine Gibson, and yet kill Gordon Grayhurst."

"It looks bad, Dick."

"It does, sir, very bad, after the record I have discovered of this same Gibson."

"It was a quarrel at the club, and Carlyle insulted Grayhurst, who knocked him down."

"Poor Marion!"

"It would be well for you, as an old friend, to go and see her, for they say that her mind is unsettled by her grief, and they fear she may take her own life."

"That would be terrible."

"You will go to see her, Dick?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I will go this afternoon."

"It will show her that she has at least one friend."

"Chief."

"What about Valentine Gibson?"

"How do you mean?"

"I believe that he is the murderer of his father, and as such he could be made to hang, upon the testimony of Doctor Parsons and myself."

"Beyond all doubt."

"Now, Marion loves this man, and it would simply kill her, did she know the truth."

"Very true; it would be well to keep our secret about Gibson for the present, at least."

"I think so, sir, for I could not be the one to add another grief to that poor girl."

"No, it would not do."

"Then we will drop on Valentine Gibson, Dick?"

"Yes, sir; for a while, at least."

"It is best."

"Now, sir, I wish to know about this man, Carlisle?"

"He left immediately after the duel, and it is said forgot to pay numerous debts he owed here in town."

"Of course he can be found and brought back."

"Oh, yes, but it would do little good, for it was said to be a square duel, and here no man would be punished for killing a man in one."

"Then, for the present let him go; but now let me tell you that I brought Diamond Jack's valet back with me."

"Black Diamond?"

"Yes, sir, I found him on a Pullman car as porter, and he is as great a scamp as his master, so I brought him along, for he is a valuable witness, too."

"Did he come willingly?"

"After I persuaded him it was the only thing he could do, sir."

"Where is he?"

"I sent him to prison, sir."

"Well, he shall be cared for."

"Now I will go to The Ferns, sir, and see poor Marion," and Dick Doom left the chief's office.

CHAPTER XXX.

DICK DOOM'S MISHAP.

WHEN Dick Doom left the office of the chief, he started at once for the rooms which he always occupied when in the city, and where he had made for himself a cozy little home, little as he occupied his quarters.

He intended making a toilet, for he was in a traveling suit, and then drive up to The Ferns plantation to see Marion.

What Valentine Gibson thought of his coming he did not care, for he felt indeed the interest in her that a brother would feel.

He was just crossing Canal street when suddenly there dashed toward him a pair of horses running away.

A glance showed him that the coachman had been thrown from the box, and that there were ladies and children in the carriage.

Springing forward he grasped the rein of one of the animals, and was dragged along by them at a terrific speed.

Straight for the river they ran, and but for that form clinging to them they would have gone into the Mississippi.

But Dick Doom held on with a grip like death, and in the end his weight began to tell, and at last he checked their flight, but not a moment too soon.

Then, when those in the carriage were saved he let go his hold and fell in a heap upon the ground.

Fortunately the chief of police just then drove by in his buggy, and lifting the unconscious young detective into his vehicle, he drove rapidly homeward, sending a messenger on the way to call two of the best physicians in the city to attend to his injured friend.

The chief's wife at once had a room prepared for him, and soon Doctors Stone and Herrick drove up and the young hero was placed in their hands.

"A fracture of the left arm above the elbow," said Doctor Stone.

"A broken collar bone," added Doctor Herrick.

"A foot half crushed, evidently trod upon by one of the horses."

"And his head has been bruised badly."

"Almost any one else would have let go thus injured."

"But he saved the lives of two ladies and three children," said the chief.

"A splendid fellow," Doctor Stone said.

"We must bring him out as good as new," added Doctor Herrick.

"Yes, but it will take a long time," was the answer.

"If devoted nursing will help, he shall have it," the chief said.

"Who is he, chief?"

"A young man who often comes to visit us, sir, and whose name is Dick Doom."

"A strange name."

"What does he do?"

"Travels."

Then the arm and collar-bone were perfectly set, the crushed foot put in position and dressed, and the patient left to rally from the shock.

But fever set in, and it was months before Dick Doom was able to sit up and gaze out upon the flowers in the chief's garden.

He was as weak as a child, but soon began to rally, and a few weeks after began to feel like his old self again.

His arm and collar-bone were all right, as good as new, and except that his foot was stiff for a while, he felt no inconvenience from it.

"How long have I been sick?" he asked his devoted friend and nurse, the chief's wife, one day.

"Just four months, Dick."

"Ah, what a long while have I been dead to the world."

"But I saved those ladies, did I not?"

"Yes, and three lovely children."

"That is a recompense."

"They came each day when you were so ill to see you, and send you flowers daily."

"They are very kind."

"Mr. Adolph is a very rich merchant, the husband of one of the ladies, and father of the children, and he says that he is going to make you junior partner of his firm."

"He is very good indeed, but I was born for a detective, and it is my destiny and none other will I follow."

"No, no, nothing can win me from being a ferret."

After a short silence Dick Doom resumed:

"And I recall now that I had some secret work to do when I was hurt."

"Dick."

The voice of the chief's wife was low and sympathetic.

"Yes, madam."

"Are you strong enough for me to tell you some bad news?"

"Oh, yes, for nothing can hurt me now," he said with a sad smile.

"It is about your old friends of The Ferns."

"Of Marion, for Gordon is dead?"

"Yes."

"Has Gibson deserted her?"

"She has left him."

"Left Gibson, her husband?"

"Yes, forever."

"Ah! you mean that Marion is dead?"

"Yes, she is dead."

"Happy Marion."

"Shall I tell you of her?"

"Yes."

"You are strong enough to bear it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, Dick, I am sorry that you did not see her, and fate seemed against it, to lay you up as it did."

"But she was watched after her brother's death, for fear she might take her own life, for all feared that her mind was impaired by her sorrows."

"And she did take her own life?"

"Yes, Dick, so it is believed."

"Tell me about it."

"Well, she got away from her attendant one evening, the negroes dropping off to sleep, and going to the river she went off in her little boat.

"The boat was found, with her hat and gloves in it, and this showed that she had evidently sprung into the river and thus ended her own life."

"Alas! what a fate, what a cruel fate."

"It was, indeed, Dick."

"Her father killed by being thrown from his horse, Marion becoming the wife of Valentine Gibson, Gordon falling in a duel, and now Marion dying by her own hand."

"How strange fate has pursued them, while I, without home, kindred, yes, excepting you and the chief, with no friends, I live on and prosper."

"Nothing takes me off, I am hard to kill, and so live on to carry out my destined career."

"You are spared from all the dangers you have passed through for some good purpose, Dick."

"It may be, and it may not be."

"But where is Valentine Gibson?"

"He has gone."

"Where?"

"No one knows; but his grief was so great that he settled up his affairs, sold the property he came in possession of by his wife's death, for she left him all in her will, and went away, some say to foreign lands, but no one seems to know."

"He began to drink heavily, and it is thought that he will soon end his life in a drunkard's grave."

"Or on the gallows," muttered Dick Doom.

Then he asked:

"What does the chief think of all this?"

"He is here, so ask him, Dick," and as the lady spoke the chief rode up to the gate, sprung from his buggy and entering the cottage gave the young detective his usual hearty greeting.

CONCLUSION.

What the chief thought of the death of Marion Grayhurst, he soon made known to Dick Doom in his own way.

"You see, Dick, remembering the secret we held against Gibson, I was naturally prejudiced against him."

"When the news of his wife's death came I went myself to The Ferns to investigate."

"Every one on the place, and around it, I questioned, and I put Valentine Gibson through a cross-examination that would break down almost any man."

"From the people I learned only of his perfect devotion to his wife, but I also discovered that she did not love him."

"No; had she loved her husband she would never have taken her own life from grief for her dead brother, in my opinion," said Dick Doom, quickly.

"You have hit the nail upon the head, I feel sure."

"I believe she married the man to save her brother, and when he was taken from her, then she was glad to go, too."

"She took her own life, I am convinced."

"And Valentine Gibson?"

"Well, I rather liked the fellow, and certainly pitied his grief."

"He spent large sums in an effort to find his wife's body, and failing, was almost crazed."

"At last he got rid of his property at great sacrifice, and set off on his travels, going no one knows where."

"Chief?"

"Yes, Dick."

"Somehow I am suspicious of that man, I cannot help it, and some day I shall ferret out all the secrets of the death of Gordon Grayhurst and his sister Marion."

And Dick Doom kept his word, for he followed blindly on in the destiny which he felt in his heart shaped his ends.

THE END.

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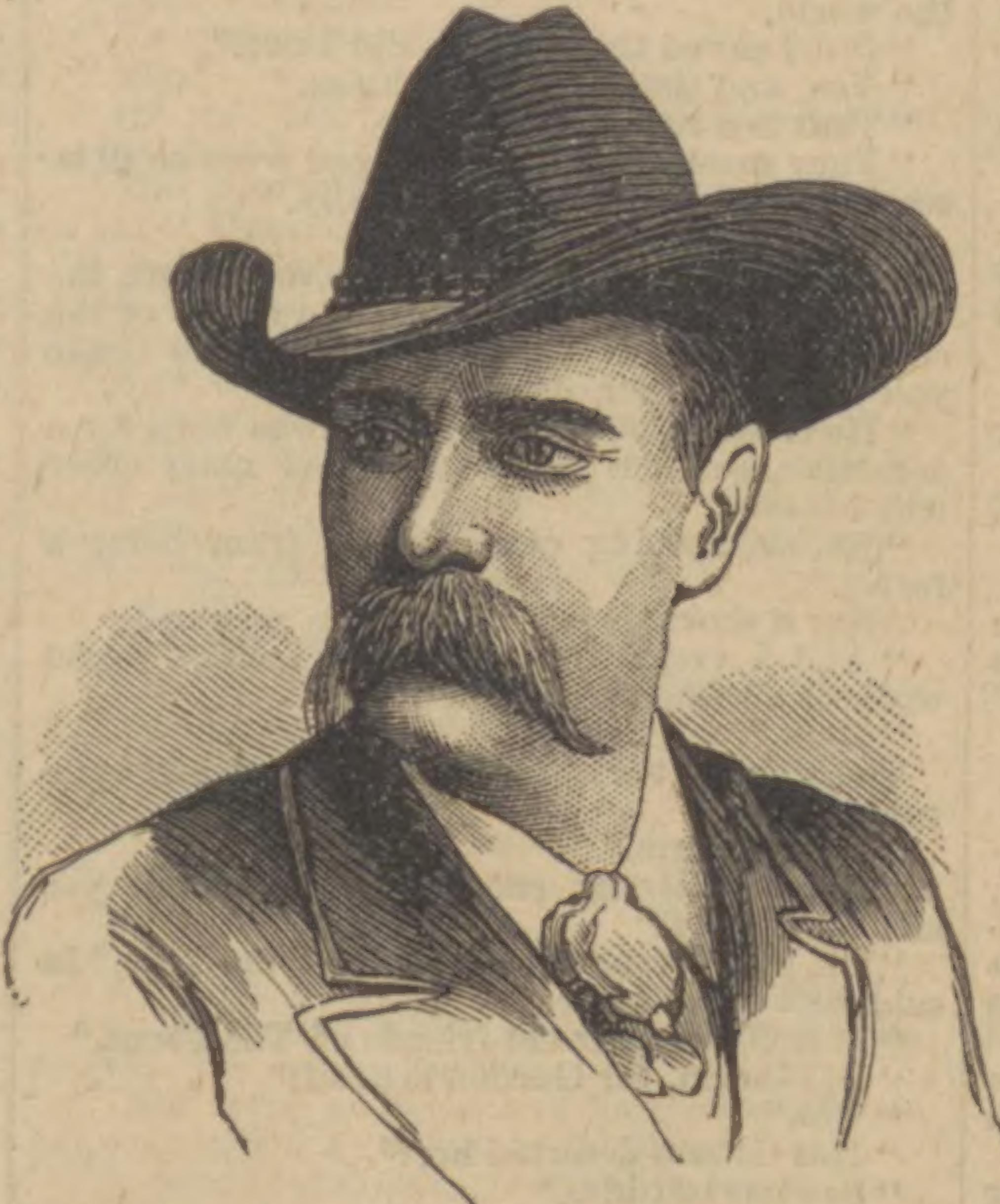


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